

Media availability: Doctors respond to Jason Kenney re: fossil fuel health risks

Toronto, Feb. 20, 2020 – Edmonton doctor John O'Connor, a member with Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), is available to speak to media today about the grave health and environmental risks of the planned Teck Tarsands Project, and address [Alberta Premier Jason Kenney's comments](#) that doctors are not “living in the real world” when it comes to the health and climate impacts of the fossil fuel industry.

Kenney was responding to [a letter signed by doctors across Canada](#), issued yesterday by CAPE, urging the federal government to reject the Teck project.

“As doctors on the front lines treating patients with climate change-related health issues, we are outraged that Jason Kenney, a career politician, has the gall to suggest that health professionals aren’t living in the real world on the issue of climate change,” says Dr. O’Connor, a family practitioner in Fort McMurray and the surrounding area.

“When people are injured in climate-related disasters like the Calgary flood, the Slave Lake fire and the Fort McMurray fire, who looks after these patients? When we have cancers at increased rates in communities near fossil fuel operations, when children have asthma due to poor air quality related to wildfires – it’s health professionals that care for them,” he says.

Dr. O’Connor raised concerns about an increased rate of bile duct cancer in the small community of Fort Chipewyan, which has seen the direct and increasing environmental impact of upstream tarsands mining operations.

“The science on the link between climate change and health is conclusive,” he says. “We know from real data gathered by real scientists in the real world that a warming climate is causing serious health issues and creating a spike in natural disasters that are a grave threat to our health and to the future of humanity. Fossil fuel development is spewing carbon pollution into our atmosphere and warming our planet. We need to find alternatives. We cannot continue with fossil fuel development and fight climate change at the same time.”

The Teck Tarsands Project, proposed for a site 110 km north of Fort McMurray, Alberta, would disturb 29,217 hectares of land – roughly twice the area of the City of Vancouver – and operate for 41 years, producing about 260,000 barrels per day of bitumen. As the largest open pit tarsands mine in Canada's history, it's projected to produce four to six megatonnes of greenhouse gases per year until 2066.

Dr. O'Connor is a primary care physician who treats patients in Fort McMurray and surrounding Indigenous communities, including Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, and Chard/Janvier. He is available for on-camera, Skype, and phone interviews.

To read CAPE's press release and letter re: Teck, [click here](#).

To schedule an interview, contact:

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