

“Tactics as Dirty as Their Oil”: Leaked Docs Reveal TransCanada’s Propaganda Plan

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TransCanada President and CEO Russ Girling as he announced the new Energy East Pipeline during a news conference in Calgary, Alberta in 2013. (Photo: Reuters/Todd Koro)

Documents show that oil and gas companies are placing serious resources of time, money, and personnel into countering the growing climate justice movement. “What this speaks to is that they are losing,” says one campaigner whose group has been targeted by company strategy.

Internal strategy documents prepared by a public relations firm on behalf of Canadian pipeline giant TransCanada reveal details of an enormous and well-organized effort by the oil industry to neutralized the transnational grassroots movement which has grown up around the industry’s effort to expand tar sands mining and the building of huge infrastructure projects designed to get “the world’s dirtiest fuel” to market.

Obtained by Greenpeace and given to *The Guardian* newspaper, the documents show that TransCanada—which has proposed building a pipeline called Energy East to bring tar sands from Alberta to New Brunswick through the largest such pipeline ever built—is aligned with other oil and gas companies placing serious resources of time, money, and personnel into countering the growing climate justice movement which has so far successfully delayed building the Keystone XL pipeline and affirmed its commitment to stopping similar projects in the name of fighting global warming and the resulting threat of climate change.

“These tactics are as dirty as the oil the pipeline would transport,” [said](#) Mark Calzavara of Ontario, Quebec and Nunavut regional organizer with the Council of Canadians, one of the groups named in the corporate documents. “Filling Energy East would mean the climate pollution equivalent to adding 7 million cars to our roads. It threatens over 1000 waterways along the route with a devastating diluted bitumen spill.”

Read the complete strategy document [here](#) (pdf).

As the *Guardian’s* Suzanne Goldenberg [reports](#):

The company behind the Keystone XL project is engaged in a “perpetual campaign” that would involve putting “intelligent” pressure on opponents and mobilising public support for an entirely Canadian alternative, bypassing Barack Obama and pipeline opposition in the US.

Hours before a Senate vote to force US approval of the Keystone pipeline, the

industry playbook to squash opposition to the alternative has been exposed in documents made available to the Guardian.

Strategy documents drafted by the public relations giant Edelman for TransCanada Corporation – which is behind both Keystone and the proposed alternative – offer a rare inside glimpse of the extensive public relations, lobbying, and online and on-the-ground efforts undertaken for pipeline projects. The plans call, among other things, for mobilising 35,000 supporters.

The documents were prepared for [Energy East](#), a project designed to serve as an entirely Canadian alternative to Keystone that is the biggest tar sands pipeline proposed to date.

The *New York Times*, which also received the strategy plan, [reports](#) how Edelman proposes TransCanada create “a campaign directed at opposition groups like the Council of Canadians and the David Suzuki Foundation, as well as a small community group in Ottawa that usually fights for more bike lanes and park enhancements.”

Responding to the revelations, Andrea Harden-Donaghue, lead climate campaigner for the Council of Canadians, told the *Guardian* that the ambitious scale of strategy suggested TransCanada was concerned about growing opposition to the Energy East project. “What this speaks to is that they are losing,” she said. “What these documents reveal is that they are bringing Tea Party activists into the equation in Canada combined with a heavyhanded advertising campaign. They are clearly spending a lot of time and thought on our efforts. I’d rather see them address the concerns that we are raising.”

Other key sections of the document include (emphasis added):

- Borrowing a page from the modern political playbook, we recommend a three-track approach to build the necessary campaign infrastructure. This approach strives to neutralize risk before it is leveled, respond directly to issues or attacks as they arise, and apply pressure-intelligently-on opponents, as appropriate.
- It is critical to play offence, both to define the story ourselves and proactively manage issues. But if we place ourselves in a position where we are managing issues solely on a day-to-day basis, we may win the battle but lose the proverbial war. Therefore, we don’t consider this a response program but, rather, a perpetual campaign to protect and enhance the value of the Energy East Pipeline and to help inoculate TransCanada from potential attacks in any arena.
- Add layers of difficulty for our opponents, distracting them from their mission and causing them to redirect their resources. We cannot allow our opponents to have a free pass. They will use every piece of information they can find to attack TransCanada and this project-attacks are part of a larger, modern oppositional effort to silence those on the other side. To make an informed decision on this project, Canadians need to have a true picture of the motivations not only of the project proponents, but of its opponents as well. This point should particularly be made in communication to supportive third parties, who can in turn put the pressure on, especially when TransCanada can’t.
- One of the campaign’s most important steps involves developing a narrative that clearly tells the compelling Energy East Pipeline story and provides the opportunity for TransCanada to define the project on its own terms... the four agreed-upon campaign platforms of Safety; Environmental Stewardship; Economic Benefits & Jobs; and National (or Strategic) Interest. To do this, we will

audit existing positive messaging and creative assets, and will meet with key members of the project team to develop an umbrella message and core messages about the pipeline

- We will research the editorial calendars of key media and align our promotional efforts with them for long-lead opportunities especially.
- Media will prove a critical player in conveying our messages. We will build upon existing relationships and foster new ones with key local/national media
- Paid Media: Amplification of any promote efforts will be critical to expanding the people we reach with our stories. When positive earned coverage is published, we will amplify it using a content amplification vendor. In addition, we will use Paid Media to effectively deploy our narrative in highly contextual and targeted spaces to inform or engage the audience.
- The identification of possible areas on web properties where “dark” content could be activated in response to issues that might arise, tied to our milestone calendar or other random flare-ups that require responses.
- Detailed Background Research on Key Opposition Groups: We will prepare a research profile of key opposition groups by examining public records (including financial disclosures, legal databases and legislative records), traditional media sources (news databases such as Lexis-Nexis and Factiva) and social media (Facebook, Twitter and other relevant sites). All relevant findings will be compiled in a written, fully documented report, to include a summary of findings and an assessment of strengths and weaknesses.
- We will begin with the Council of Canadians. Other possibilities include Equiterre, the David Suzuki Foundation, Avaaz and Ecology Ottawa.

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