

B.C. CO2 Emissions Puts Government On Defence

By [Raphael Alexander](#)

23 Dec 2009

Vancouver Sun

The provincial government was on its heels today defending its record on fighting climate change after Environment Canada released a report which indicates that British Columbia is the only province to have increased its industrial greenhouse gas emissions in 2008. Top provincial journalists today pointed out the hypocrisy of Premier Gordon Campbell receiving an honour in Copenhagen last week for his introduction of the transportation carbon tax in light of the figures indicating increasing industrial emissions.

It brings into question the claim that the BC Liberals will be able to meet their emissions targets set forth with their carbon tax. The Pembina Institute recently questioned whether the government could meet their own targets of reducing 36 million tonnes of CO2 by 2020 under their current plans. According to research by the Pembina Institute, they will only manage to reduce emissions by 5 million tonnes by that date.

But the BC Liberals say that the Environment Canada report doesn't tell the whole story since it's only looking at one sector that they say accounts for a fifth of total emissions. According to the government website's energy plan, transportation in B.C. accounts for 39% of all CO2 emissions by 2004 numbers. A government spokesperson said they see no conflict in encouraging oil and gas extraction, which according to their own figures accounted for 18% of all CO2 emissions in 2004, even though only the transportation sector sees a carbon tax levied on it.

Of course, that's a bit manipulative of the statistics. If you add in the CO2 emissions released by home heating with natural gas, as well as industrial emission sources, those numbers easily eclipse the damage done by transport alone. According to more recent data from 2007, transportation emissions declined to 36%, while industry rose to 19%, and fossil fuel extraction maintained steady at 18%. When you consider that the years 2007, 2008, and 2009 were all records for B.C. natural gas extraction royalties, one would imagine that the 18% would head higher.

2008 was a record year for natural gas royalties for the province, who took in \$2.7 billion worth in land sales and royalties, while 2009 has accounted for \$893 million, with \$172.3 million in December alone. Recent interest in shale gas extraction should push CO2 emissions in natural gas even higher. So when the BC government quotes figures five years out of date, it makes a significant difference. Particularly since 2008 drove gasoline demand down with record high pump prices during the summer peak.

Something else that the B.C. government has been reticent in admitting is that our natural gas extraction is closely tied to Alberta's Oilsands. Northeast B.C., where most of the natural gas exploration and extraction has been paying dividends for the province, is now considering a new natural gas processing plant. The EnCana Cabin Gas Plant would emit 2.166 million tonnes of greenhouse gases per year at full capacity, a 3.27% increase above 2006 emissions.

This would be the equivalent of letting 450,000 cars into B.C. in order to facilitate the province's new desire to push natural gas extraction. Subsidies and corporate breaks on royalties has increased extraction and investment here in natural gas exploration, and extraction is predicted to rise by industry experts. If the province takes this direction, it would have to find some other ways to reduce their carbon footprint, presumably with higher carbon taxes at the pump, or expanding the tax into consumer products.

If the B.C. Liberals bring in a cap and trade scheme, it would have to take into account the natural gas sector. But adding costs to companies who have been lured here on subsidies seems to run contrary to the province's business plan of attracting investment from sources outside the province. While it's true that we've only seen one part of the total in the Environment Canada report, all indications are that the news would be worse, not better, than the figures the province is quoting from 2004.

Adrian MacNair is a Vancouver writer who sometimes writes under his middle name, Raphael Alexander. You can read more at his blog [here](#).