



Oregon Sierra Club

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**“No New Fossil Fuels Infrastructure”: First, Do No More Harm**  
*An Open Letter to the Portland City Council*

**Preamble Summary, Resolution 37168, November 12, 2015:  
Oppose expansion of infrastructure whose primary  
purpose is transporting or storing fossil fuels in or  
through Portland or adjacent waterways.**

Portland is at imminent risk of squandering its prior leadership in dealing with the local response to our global climate crisis. The problem is serious bureaucratic back-sliding into a “business as usual” mentality in the implementation of Resolution 37168. Unless you deal promptly and firmly with signals of agency misunderstanding of both the letter and spirit of this resolution, this situation could too easily become a local crisis in its own right.

This binding policy resolution, which you approved unanimously on November 12, 2015, catapulted our city into the forefront of local, regional, national, and international efforts to confront one of the greatest sets of challenges our species has faced since the development of industrial technology.

It is vital that you remember the genesis of this effort, and re-commit to the specific – often difficult! – changes in municipal and stakeholder planning and behavior for your mission.

There is a straightforward but interlocking four-part schematic that outlines precisely where we are as a global and local political economy:

- |                                 |                                    |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Keep It in the Ground</b> | <b>3. Reduce the Need</b>          |
| <b>2. Do No More Harm</b>       | <b>4. Make the Just Transition</b> |

**1. Keep It in the Ground**

We now know that our combustion of fossil fuels has moved our global atmosphere and temperature structure into such dangerous territory that civilization is genuinely at risk if we do not make radical reversals in behavior.

At least four-fifths of global fossil fuel reserves must be left completely intact, in the ground, and never exploited.

This requirement is completely contrary to modern corporate financial structure, because proven reserves constitute roughly half of the assets (and therefore a major component of share value) of the fossil fuels companies. This is one of the key reasons why business-as-usual policies and procedures are inevitably doomed to failure – for both corporate financial health and planetary social and environmental health. This has been one key factor in the current financial collapse of shareholder equity in coal corporations.

Acceptance of ***Keep It in the Ground*** is a mandatory first step for both the psychological and political economy revisions we must make for survival. This is the foundation for the other three intersecting components of this basic methodology. Resolution 37168 speaks eloquently to many of the issues inherent in our mandatory recognition of our new reality.

## **2. Do No More Harm**

Understanding the compulsory physics and chemistry of ***Keep It in the Ground*** leads inevitably to this second principle: don't make things worse by continuing down the same destructive path. We must begin with our environmental version of the first line of the Hippocratic Oath: ***Do No More Harm***.

This is the required primary set of actions for directly confronting the climate crisis: to get out of this hole, first we have to stop digging. “No New Fossil Fuel Infrastructure” is the easiest way to proceed first. The core of Resolution 37168 – preventing new export and storage infrastructure – falls completely within this principle.

**It is imperative that you maintain and defend your policy.**

## **3. Reduce the Need**

Simultaneously, demand reduction is vital to permit us to ***Do No More Harm***. Gradual complete elimination of coal for electrical production in Oregon is now state law. The same goal must be applied to oil and natural gas, urgently. As I noted in my testimony to you on November 12, there is no fossil fuel solution to the fossil fuels crisis.

You must align City procedures and economic governance with this need for both conservation and energy efficiency (which are overlapping but distinct sets of tools). Beyond direct City internal control and external economic governance, you must also push the Portland business communities – especially the fossil fuels companies – and the other governments that overlap with and impact your work to both ***Do No More Harm*** and ***Reduce the Need***.

## **4. Make the Just Transition**

Finally, underpinning all these efforts must be the recognition that there is no substantive difference among environmental, economic, and social justice. We are engaged in a transition into a full-renewables energy economy, and that will be impossible unless it is done based on justice for all. The urgency of the effort means that coordination of ***Do No More Harm***, ***Reduce the Need***, and ***Make the Just Transition*** becomes the essence of this era.

Thank you for your consideration.

Ted Gleichman, on behalf of Oregon Sierra Club