

badvertising

Stop advertising the crisis

The case for fossil fuel advertising bans

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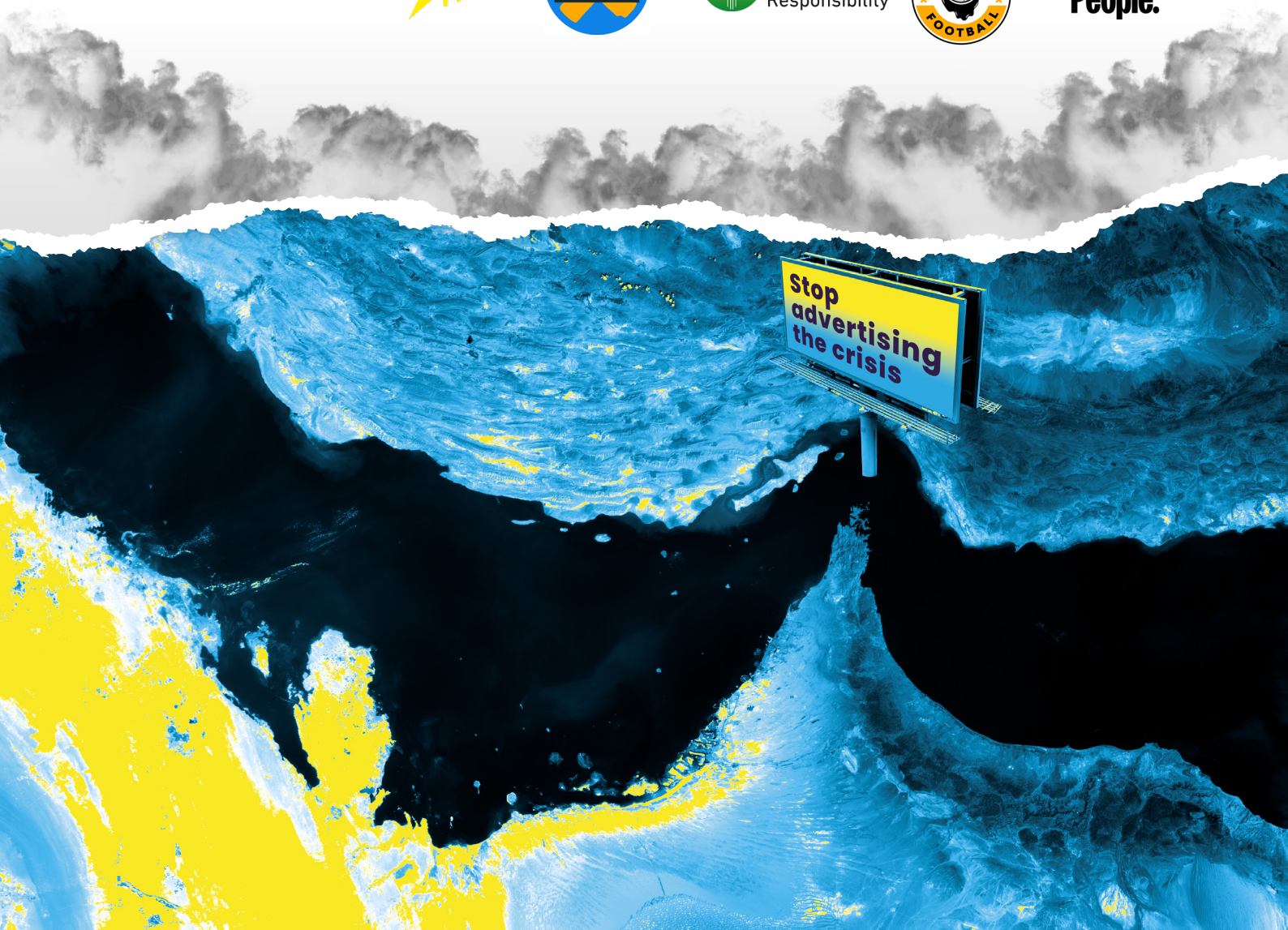
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April 2026

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Introduction



The war in the Middle East and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has removed up to 20 million barrels of oil from global markets per day, alongside other key industrial inputs, producing the largest fossil fuel supply shock in history. Governments are already asking citizens to drive less, fly less, heat less – and in some countries, to queue for rationed fuel. Yet fossil fuel companies and other high-carbon industries continue to advertise and promote their products freely, stimulating the very demand that these emergency policies are trying to suppress.

This briefing makes a simple case: if governments are prepared to limit how much fuel citizens can buy, they must also stop allowing the advertising of goods and services that burn it.

The case for a ban does not rest on the current crisis alone. Fossil fuels are responsible for an estimated 8.7 million premature deaths each year from air pollution,¹ and are increasingly recognised alongside tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food as health-harming products whose promotion should be restricted. The current energy emergency makes the case urgent. The underlying health and climate harms make it permanent.

Advertising bans and restrictions are quick to implement, not disruptive and allow governments to send a powerful signal at the local, regional and national levels. This will not only reduce dependence on fossil fuels and improve public health, but help insulate the economy from the increasing volatility of oil and gas prices and interruptions in supply, alongside cutting emissions and phasing out fossil fuels in line with national and international climate commitments.

The political window to act is open right now. And we must seize it. We are calling for:

- The introduction of legislation prohibiting advertising for fossil fuel intensive goods and services whose primary use-case generates significant greenhouse gas emissions and consumes fossil fuels. These measures should be permanent in order to cut demand and reliance on fossil fuels in line with national and international climate targets.

¹ Vohra et al., 2021, 'Global mortality from outdoor fine particle pollution generated by fossil fuel combustion: Results from GEOS-Chem', Environmental Research, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envres.2021.110754>

- Restrict fossil fuel companies' ability to run brand or reputational advertising and sponsorship campaigns to prevent greenwashing or other efforts to improve corporate reputations in a period of public sacrifice.
- Bans and restrictions on pricing mechanisms that reduce the price and thereby promote consumption of luxury energy intensive goods and services, such as private jets.



BP advert at Westminster Tube Station, London, 2023

The Crisis: the worst fossil fuel energy shock in history



The US-Israeli war on Iran has produced what the International Energy Agency (IEA) has described as the “greatest threat to global energy security in history”.² The near-total closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a passage of water through which one-fifth of the world’s oil and LNG normally flows, has removed up to 20 million barrels per day from global markets. As a result, the price of oil and gas has surged, almost guaranteeing inflation rates across the world that will buckle economies and push many citizens into poverty. The closure of the Strait also means that supplies of other key industrial inputs, from nitrogen fertilizer to helium, have stopped, adding further inflationary pressure to food and other essentials.³

Governments across the world are already responding with emergency measures. Senior European Union (EU) officials have urged people to work from home, drive and fly less, and for EU countries to urgently roll out renewables. Dan Jørgenson, the EU energy chief, stressed that “we will not go back to normal in the foreseeable future”.⁴ The Philippines, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have mandated a four-day working week to conserve energy, while Indonesia has instructed all citizens to work from home.⁵ Two states in Australia have announced free public transport to help with rising costs. The IEA has issued guidance to governments on how to reduce demand for fossil fuels, such as mandating work-from-home, cutting speed limit, and cutting air travel.⁶

² IEA, 2026, ‘The Middle East and Global Energy Markets’, <https://www.iea.org/topics/the-middle-east-and-global-energy-markets>

³ Hanieh, 2026, ‘Bottling the World Economy’, <https://www.nybooks.com/online/2026/03/23/bottling-the-world-economy-hormuz-gulf/>

⁴ Politico, 2026, ‘Top Brussels official urges Europeans to work from home and drive less’, <https://www.politico.eu/article/europeans-urged-to-work-from-home-and-drive-less-as-eu-warns-of-long-crisis/>

⁵ Sky News, 2026, ‘How countries are dealing with rising oil and gas prices’, <https://news.sky.com/story/how-countries-are-dealing-with-rising-oil-and-gas-prices-13526096>

⁶ IEA, 2026, ‘Sheltering From Oil Shocks’, <https://www.iea.org/reports/sheltering-from-oil-shocks>

The Policy Case: Why Now?



Demand reduction requires behaviour change

Given the shock to energy supplies and the many months that it will take for fossil fuel production and distribution to recover and resume, reducing demand is the most obvious and immediate response to the unfolding crisis. Government policy usually relies on price signals and voluntary action to cut demand, policy tools that are slow, regressive, and insufficient at crisis speed. However, the scale of the crisis has injected a sense of urgency, with governments cutting the working week, mandating work from home and asking for travel to be kept to a minimum to reduce the consumption of fossil fuels. The fossil fuel industry, however, is pushing for expanded production. Research published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that fossil fuel advertising expenditure spikes ahead of elections and major policy debates, a pattern consistent with tobacco industry tactics for shaping legislative outcomes.⁷

Advertising bans are a proven lever for accelerating behaviour change, cutting demand and achieving climate and public health objectives. Evidence from tobacco, gambling, car and junk food shows that advertising bans and restrictions are an effective means of permanently cutting consumption.

The severity of the current energy crisis requires expansive and immediate government action that uses all available levers. Measures to reduce demand for fossil fuel-intensive goods and services, from air travel to brand new petrol or diesel cars, must tackle the sources of that demand: advertising is an important driver of demand that is easy and cheap to mitigate, and can be effective within a few months. Other possible demand reduction measures include a ban on discounts on fossil fuel products, car-free days in towns and cities, and higher prices for luxury fossil-fueled travel, such as a tax on private jet use.

⁷ Green, S. & Temper, L., 2026, 'The health case for a fossil fuel advertising ban', *CMAJ*, <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/198/5/E176>



A satirical poster calls out British Cycling's sponsorship deal with Shell (photo: Brandalism, 2024).

Advertising fossil fuel-intensive goods and services is perverse in an energy emergency

In any response to a crisis, the consistency and coherence of government messaging is vitally important to ensuring policy success. While the public is being asked to drive less, avoid flights, and reduce heating, fossil fuel companies and sectors highly dependent on fossil fuels continue to advertise their products at scale. This creates a policy contradiction that undermines public trust and the legitimacy of demand-reduction measures.

Fossil fuel advertising actively stimulates and normalises the demand that governments are simultaneously trying to suppress. In energy emergencies, this is not a free-speech question: it is a coherence question.

The policy has precedent and legal grounding

Fossil fuel advertising bans and restrictions are not radical proposals. They are an existing and growing trend around the world. Alongside their potential to cut emissions and reduce demand for fossil fuels, these policies build on the growing

consensus that fossil fuels, like tobacco, are health-harming products whose promotion should be restricted.⁸

- The Hague in the Netherlands became the world's first capital to put an advertising ban into law, which covered fossil fuel products. This ban was tested in court on multiple grounds and passed all tests. Since then, twelve Dutch municipalities have followed.⁹
- Sheffield, Edinburgh, and Sydney have introduced council-level restrictions, with many more cities, councils and local authorities around the world exploring advertising restrictions.¹⁰
- The Secretary General of the United Nations called for a worldwide ban on fossil advertising¹¹. His call was later repeated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights,¹² the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee¹³ and the Special Rapporteurs to the UN, who wrote "A ban of fossil fuel ads can prevent increasing emissions that easily could have been avoided as fossil fuel advertising promotes climate inaction and drives fossil fuel demand."¹⁴
- In the UK and the Netherlands, thirteen advisory reports of scientific advisory bodies have been issued to the government advising fossil fuel advertising bans and restrictions as ("essential") part of climate policy.¹⁵

Crucially, during an energy emergency, the legal and political bar for proportionality is substantially lower. Governments already have emergency powers to restrict supply. Restricting the promotion of demand is a far less intrusive intervention, cheap to implement and popular among citizens. Surveys

⁸ Green, S. & Temper, L., 2026, 'The health case for a fossil fuel advertising ban', *CMAJ*, <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/198/5/E176>

⁹ BBC Earth, 2026, "The new tobacco": The cities banning fossil fuel adverts', <https://www.bbc.co.uk/future/article/20260217-the-cities-banning-fossil-fuel-adverts>

¹⁰ World Without Fossil Ads, (no date), <https://www.worldwithoutfossilads.org/>

¹¹ BBC News, 2024, 'Ban fossil fuel ads to save climate, says UN chief', <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv22vl99vwro>

¹² United Nations The High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024, 'Open Letter from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Türk, on priorities for human rights-based climate action at the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change', <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/climatechange/24-11-06-HC-letter.pdf>

¹³ United Nations, 2026, 'Impact of disinformation on the enjoyment and realization of human rights', <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/61/68>

¹⁴ United Nations, 2025, 'The imperative of defossilizing our economies', <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g25/070/22/pdf/g2507022.pdf>

¹⁵ World Without Fossil Ads, 2026, 'Factsheet - legal, science and societal support for the fossil ad ban', <https://www.worldwithoutfossilads.org/factsheet-legal-science-societal-support-for-the-fossil-ad-ban/>

conducted across 13 EU countries found that nearly half of the 19,000 respondents support a ban on fossil fuel advertising, with 46.6% of people in favour, almost double the number who were opposed. Support for advertising bans and restrictions outweighed opposition in every country surveyed.

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While saying it is in favour of low carbon energy, BP has been doubling down on fossil fuels. BP advert at Westminster Tube Station, London, 2023.

¹⁶ Bouman et al., 2025, 'Local fossil fuel ad ban as a catalyst for global change', *Nature Climate Change*, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-025-02267-4>

The fossil ad ban as a climate policy measure to reduce demand is supported by science. Scientists identify a fossil advertising ban even as the “low hanging fruit” of climate policy because of the public support, the effectiveness and the reach.¹⁷ In 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recommended restricting advertising for fossil fuel intensive luxury products in its 6th Assessment (WG3). The permanent presence of fossil fuel advertising has a strongly normalizing effect. The IPCC especially highlights long-haul flights and energy-intensive cars. Research also shows that a fossil ad ban can encourage product innovation for alternatives that are more energy efficient.¹⁸

The unfolding energy crisis has created a brief but significant window for policy action. Around the world governments are already normalising demand-reduction interventions that will reduce dependence on fossil fuels and insulate the economy from future price and supply volatility. An advertising ban for fossil fuel intensive goods, services and industries is among the least intrusive, most symbolically coherent, and most institutionally straightforward of those interventions, firmly backed by science. It tells citizens that the government is serious; it removes a major source of contradictory messaging; and it lays the groundwork for structural behaviour change that will outlast the crisis itself.

Recommended Actions



Governments facing an energy crisis that will quickly reduce living standards and stir discontent among citizens should consider the following measures:

- Introduce legislation prohibiting advertising for fossil fuel intensive goods and services whose primary use-case generates significant greenhouse gas emissions and consumes fossil fuels. These measures should be permanent in order to cut demand and

¹⁷ Capable Climate, 2025, ‘Fossil Fuel Advertising Bans are Broadly Supported Across Europe’, <https://capableclimate.eu/fossil-fuel-ad-ban-support/>

¹⁸ McDowall & Underthun, 2025, ‘Advertising restrictions and sustainability transitions: does banning advertising of harmful products induce innovation in benign alternatives?’, *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2210422425000395?via%3Dihub>

reliance on fossil fuels in line with national and international climate targets.

- Prohibit fossil fuel companies from running brand or reputational advertising and sponsorship campaigns to prevent greenwashing or other efforts to improve corporate reputations in a period of public sacrifice.
- Prohibit pricing mechanisms that reduce the price and thereby promote consumption of luxury energy intensive goods and services, such as private jets.



An unauthorised billboard artwork underlines the basic message of advertising (photo: Brandalism, 2012).

Organisations that support the recommendations set out in this briefing:

- Adfree Cities
<https://adfreecities.org.uk/>
- Badvertising
<https://www.badverts.org/>
- Buni Media
<https://www.bunimedia.com/>
- ClientEarth
<https://www.clientearth.org/>
- Common Weal
<https://www.commonweal.scot/>
- Comms Declare
<https://commsdeclare.org/>
- Creatives for Climate
<https://www.creativesforclimate.co/>
- Fossil Free Football
<https://www.fossilfreefootball.org/>
- KlimaKultur
<https://www.klimakultur.no/>
- New Weather Institute
<https://www.newweather.org/>
- Reclame Fossielvrij
<https://verbiedfossielereclame.nl/>
- Scientists for Global Responsibility
<https://www.sgr.org.uk/>
- Serious People
<https://seriouspeople.co/>