



OUR HORIZON

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau & Minister McKenna
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6

November 30, 2015

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau & Minister McKenna,

Re: New, inexpensive Canadian policy idea to help the world address climate change

I'm the executive director of *Our Horizon* and a lawyer. *Our Horizon* is a Canadian non-profit advocacy group that works with governments to pass legislation requiring climate change & air pollution risk disclosures on gas pumps. I'm writing to thank you for your *Minister of Environment and Climate Change Mandate Letter* that calls for constructive dialogue with non-profits and recognizes the importance of avoiding a two-degree increase in average global temperatures. I'm also writing to tell you more about *Our Horizon's* climate change labelling initiative and our plans to share it with the world.

Since launching the proposal in early 2013, it has been [endorsed by](#) some of the top climate change researchers in the world and over a hundred academics from a variety of disciplines at universities across North America. It has similarly been [endorsed by](#) numerous environmental NGOs, and is now getting legislative traction in several communities across Canada and the U.S.

Discourse on climate change tends to focus on points of extraction (e.g., oil sands and offshore drilling) or means of transportation (e.g., pipelines and shipping), but a well-to-wheel lifecycle analysis reveals that roughly 80% of greenhouse gas emissions from this sector come from end use; emissions from extraction and distribution pale in comparison to emissions from vehicle combustion. Moreover, the only reason any of this upstream infrastructure exists is simply because there's a market for fossil fuels. We vilify our fellow Canadians who work in oil producing provinces merely for providing a product we all use.

People who work in the fossil fuel sector are not our enemy; our greatest obstacle to transitioning to a more sustainable future is the inertia of the status quo. The simple act of pumping gas is a habitual, automatic, demand-side behaviour that has been normalized for several generations. It is the perfect downstream environment to perpetuate the status quo. The *New Economics Foundation*, a leading think tank on behavioural economics, observes that "Psychologists' theories on changing habits generally involve first unfreezing the subconscious action and raising it to a conscious level where we can consider the merits of alternative behaviours." The warning labels take the unexamined act of gassing up and de-normalize it.

By communicating hidden costs to end-users in this way, the labels disrupt the status quo and create a broader sense of dissatisfaction with existing solutions to stimulate demand for alternatives and drive

change upstream. Businesses and governments will respond to this shift in demand. To learn more about the concept, I encourage you to [read the articles I wrote](#) in *Municipal World*, a publication read by municipal staff and councillors across Canada. You can also [watch my TEDx talk](#) for a brief overview of the idea. Being just a sticker, it's also quite possibly one of the lowest cost climate interventions in the world.

This past January, 2015, the District of West Vancouver unanimously passed a resolution "...that all vendors of retail petroleum products in Canada be legislated to provide warning labels on all pump handles...". Since then, the concept has received support from mayors and councillors from across British Columbia (it passed at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities' annual convention), Councils in Oakville (see [letter addressed to your predecessors](#)), Waterloo, and Guelph, the Association of Francophone Municipalities of New Brunswick (a group made up of 53 member municipalities), and many more communities. In the U.S., Berkeley, San Francisco, Santa Monica, and Seattle are all at various stages in pursuing this Canadian innovation. Recently, Councils in North Vancouver, Port Moody, and Tofino voted to implement the labels locally. We expect more to follow. The [CBC](#), [Global News](#), [CTV](#), [VICE](#), [The Atlantic](#), [Business Insider](#), and several others called North Vancouver's vote a historic global first. The news has been shared via social media all over the world.

In 2001, Canada became the first jurisdiction in the world to require pictorial warnings on tobacco packages, an idea that has since been adopted by over 70 countries and has primed our climate change labelling proposal to go global too. In addition to working with municipalities across Canada to build support for the initiative, we are also developing a database of thousands of politicians from around the world; this will enable us to contact them in order to encourage them to pursue it in their own jurisdictions.

I'd like for Canada to lead the way again on one of the most important issues of our time. It will take courage, honesty, and a sense of shared responsibility to address the climate challenge before us. These are Canadian values that are embodied by the intervention and they are values that I would like to see us share with the world at COP21 and beyond.

Please contact me at robert@ourhorizon.org to arrange a time to discuss this project and to work towards bringing the idea forward together. I look forward to meeting you upon your return from Paris.

Sincerely,



Robert Shirkey

Executive Director, Our Horizon
robert@ourhorizon.org