

# THE HUFFINGTON POST

THE INTERNET NEWSPAPER: NEWS BLOGS VIDEO COMMUNITY

---

## Our Climate Hangover: 5 Reasons to End America's Fossil Fuel Fiesta in 2014

---

Kassie Siegel

Director, Center for Biological Diversity's  
Climate Law Institute

It was a heck of a party. For America's oil and gas industry, 2013 was another festive year of incredible financial gains and expanding opportunities.

Even as petroleum companies raked in up to \$175,000 a minute in profits, the Obama administration has leased millions of acres of your public land to the oil and gas industry while shrugging off concerns about fracking pollution.

Thanks to dangerous new fracking techniques and lax regulators, the U.S. is becoming -- temporarily, at least -- the world's largest producer of oil and gas. So many people in fracked communities have already lost their health, their quality of life, and even their homes to the immediate ravages of this toxic activity.

But perhaps the highest price for this festival of corporate greed may be paid by the climate and those who depend on it -- meaning, you, me, and every other creature on earth. A climate hangover of monumental proportions awaits us all in the aftermath of this modern-day fossil fuel frenzy.

2013, after all, was the year we saw atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations pass 400 parts per million for the first time in human history. And it delivered a raft of grim scientific news, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's landmark report showing that manmade global warming is already endangering the planet.

There was even an ominous warning from federal scientists that temperatures could rise as much as 10 degrees Fahrenheit by 2100.

President Obama has famously vowed to fight climate change. But where's the decisive action? From weak power plants emissions rules to an "all of the above" energy strategy that paves the way for dirty new oil and gas production, the Obama administration just hasn't stood up to big polluters.

There's still time to change, though. Here are five key studies from 2013 that should inspire the president to take a bold new approach in the year ahead:

1. Warming Spiral: Global warming may be far worse than previously suspected, according to a just-published study in *Nature*. Researchers found that fewer sunlight-reflecting clouds will form as the Earth heats up. That could lock the planet into even further temperature increases.

2. Terrifying biodiversity threat: Polar bears aren't the only animals at risk from global warming. More than half the habitats of most plants and about one-third of animals will be destroyed by climate change by 2080 unless we curb carbon pollution, according to a May study in the journal *Nature Climate Change*. (And my own organization's analysis shows that hundreds of America's endangered species will be imperiled by sea-level rise).

3. Fracking's methane pollution: Fracking and drilling for oil and gas produce about 50 percent more methane than suggested by federal estimates, according to a November study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. That matters because methane is a dangerously potent greenhouse gas -- and because the Obama administration has mistakenly supported fracking as a way to fight global warming.

4. Storm surge danger: Storm surges could become 10 times more frequent as the world warms, according to an April study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*. These devastating walls of water can wreak havoc on America's coastal communities, as we saw during Hurricane Sandy.

5. Most fossil fuels must stay in the ground: Averting climate chaos requires leaving most remaining coal and unconventional fossil fuels (including those extracted by fracking) in the ground, says a paper by former NASA climate scientist James Hansen and 17 other high-profile scientists. If we don't act decisively, these experts say, there will "potentially disastrous impacts on today's young people, future generations, and nature."

This isn't just sobering, it's frightening. But if President Obama and other leaders can face the tough truth about climate change -- that we're running out of time to take meaningful action -- there's still a chance to change course.

Let's hope the president resolves to leave his comfort zone in 2014 and start making the kind of big moves needed to preserve a livable planet -- like using the Clean Air Act to achieve significant greenhouse pollution reductions, as requested by thousands of people and nearly 80 "Clean Air Cities" around the country.