

Exxon knew of climate change in 1981, email says

By Suzanne Goldenberg, Guardian

ExxonMobil, the world's biggest oil company, knew as early as 1981 of climate change – seven years before it became a public issue, according to a newly discovered email from one of the firm's own scientists. Despite this the firm spent millions over the next 27 years to promote climate denial.

The email from Exxon's in-house climate expert provides evidence the company was aware of the connection between fossil fuels and climate change, and the potential for carbon-cutting regulations that could hurt its bottom line, over a generation ago – factoring that knowledge into its decision about an enormous gas field in south-east Asia. The field, off the coast of Indonesia, would have been the single largest source of global warming pollution at the time.

“Exxon first got interested in climate change in 1981 because it was seeking to develop the Natuna gas field off Indonesia,” Lenny Bernstein, a 30-year industry veteran and Exxon's former in-house climate expert, wrote in the email. “This is an immense reserve of natural gas, but it is 70% CO₂,” or carbon dioxide, the main driver of climate change.

However, Exxon's public position was marked by continued refusal to acknowledge the dangers of climate change, even in response to appeals from the Rockefellers, its founding family, and its continued financial support for climate denial. Over the years, Exxon spent more than \$30m on thinktanks and researchers that promoted climate denial, according to Greenpeace.

Exxon said last week that it now acknowledges the risk of climate change and does not fund climate change denial groups.

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