

Unhealthy, unnatural gas

British Columbia is facing a critical health crisis that is inextricably linked to the environment. Extreme weather events like wildfires, heat waves, and droughts are on the rise, impacting public health.¹ These events are directly connected to the global rise in temperatures caused by burning fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas.¹ The increase in fossil fuel emissions is trapping heat around our planet, turning what were once rare weather events into frequent, severe health emergencies. The 2021 heat dome is a stark example, causing over 600 deaths in BC, overwhelming health care services, and overheating essential medical equipment, such as MRIs and CT scanners.²

Fossil fuel emissions are not only heating our planet but also polluting the air.¹ Burning these fuels releases a hazardous mixture of pollutants that cause respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, contributing to an estimated 15 300 premature deaths per year in Canada.³ Reducing fossil fuel emissions, also known as decarbonization, is imperative to protect people from these harms.

One of the most pressing issues in BC is growth of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry, which is rapidly becoming the province's leading source of fossil fuel emissions.⁴ Misinformation suggests that “natural” gas is part of a clean energy transition, but there is no scientific basis for these claims. LNG is a fossil fuel predominantly composed of methane, which has heat-trapping potential 85 times greater than carbon dioxide over a 20-year span.⁴ From extraction to transportation and

usage, methane gas releases harmful pollutants that have substantial immediate and long-term health implications.

The extraction process of methane gas, known as hydraulic fracturing or fracking, involves drilling several kilometres into the earth and injecting water, sand, and chemi-

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cals to release trapped gas.⁵ This process poses multiple health risks, including water contamination, air pollution, and earthquakes.^{5,6} Despite these growing concerns, BC continues to accelerate its fracking activities.

Transporting methane gas also presents significant issues. Pipelines transporting gas are disruptive to the communities they cross. Most notably, the Coastal GasLink for methane gas transport has passed through several traditional Indigenous land areas and sparked conflict with communities like the Wet'suwet'en First Nation.⁷

Burning methane in indoor gas stoves releases harmful air pollutants, heightening the risk of asthma in children and aggravating chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.⁸ Studies have demonstrated that methane leaks persist even when the stove is off, such that range hoods are only partially protective.⁹

We are increasingly confronted with the severe health consequences of fossil fuel emissions. The urgency to reduce our dependence on LNG is backed by compelling evidence and health benefits. From a health

care perspective, LNG is a misnomer; its label as *natural* gas is in stark contrast to its substantial harm to human health. ■

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