
**Nominated for the Public Eye Swiss Award 2008
by Greenpeace Switzerland:**

Erdöl-Vereinigung [Petroleum Association]

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| Based in: | Zurich, Switzerland |
| Industry: | Association of the Swiss Oil Industry |
| Turnover / Profit: | Nonprofit (oil industry turnover 2006 ~ 17 billion) |
| CEO: | Rolf Hartl |
| Owned by: | 29 member companies |
| Employees: | 11 (2006) |

In Brief

The climate saved by oil? „Ridiculous!“ you say and even a person with only a cursory knowledge of current events will shake his head. But, believe it or not, that is exactly what the Petroleum Association suggested in a multimillion-dollar marketing campaign. „Heating with oil: for more climate protection“ was the message that deliberately misled not only consumers but also the politicians who have followed the Petroleum Association’s self-serving suggestions many times before. The Swiss commission for Fairness in commercial communication, an advertising industry watchdog, recently condemned the PA’s cynical „greenwashing“ ploy. Although precedent setting this verdict against one of the most powerful industry associations does not diminish the immense influence of the petroleum-lobby on the country’s climate policy. Still, even small victories can generate new energy and ideas for ways to hold climate sinners accountable, both in Switzerland and abroad.

An Industry Association Behaves Badly

In a report published in February 2007 the United Nations’ intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) concluded, based on incontrovertible evidence, that human activity was causing climate change, especially the burning of fossil fuels like oil and coal (In the absence of coal-fired power plants coal is actually a minor problem in Switzerland). Barely one month later, the Petroleum Association – the commercial and political lobby group of the Swiss oil industry (its members are oil importers and distributors from Migros to Shell) started a counter offensive to win back customers and politicians. The ad that was to save the industry’s face (and pocketbook) was produced by PR-agency Lesch+Frey and appeared repeatedly in the pages of virtually the entire Swiss press over a period of two months. „Heating with oil: for more climate protection“ read the slogan, claiming in effect that the increased efficiency of modern oil burners with some solar collectors and better insulation thrown in for good measure would reduce CO₂-emissions and thus protected the climate. Greenpeace filed a complaint

with the *Swiss commission for Fairness in commercial communication*, accusing the Petroleum Association of misusing the idea of climate protection for their gain and deliberately confusing consumers and politicians, since oil clearly was the second most climate-active fuel after coal. Greenpeace also challenged the efficiency argument by saying that competing products could claim similar increases. And, yes, adding solar collectors and insulation certainly helped protect the climate but has nothing to do with the issue of oil heaters. In its 15-page apology the Petroleum Association made no attempt to answer these charges, a fact that may have prompted the integrity commission to approve the complaint on November 6 and warn the Petroleum Association not to use such „deceptive advertising statements in the future“.

Consequences

With its commercial campaigns and political initiatives the Petroleum Association continues to sabotage all attempts at a responsible Swiss climate policy. Road traffic is and remains the most worrisome aspect of our climate changing activities because the CO₂-emissions generated by vehicles of all kinds are growing inexorably. In 2002 the Petroleum Association launched the „climate penny“ as a direct alternative to a neutral CO₂-tax. The federal government adopted the proposal in 2005 even though it does not reverse the trend in emissions. Some of the revenue generated by the climate penny will be used to finance marginal climate projects in Switzerland but most of it will go towards foreign emission certificates, to cover most of the CO₂-reduction that Switzerland is committed to under international agreements. It is not the first time that the fossil fuel lobby has pulled off a trick like that and as a result the industrialized countries, whose actual CO₂-emissions keep rising despite their rhetoric, are losing their climate protection credibility.

Current situation and demands

Buoyed by its small success, Greenpeace plans to continue on the current track by investigating possibilities for further legal action against „climate sinners“ (in communication as well as in deed) and ways of establishing a legal precedent for a ‚right to be protected from manmade climate change‘. Greenpeace is also asking the Petroleum Association to drop its opposition to climate protection measures that reduce oil consumption. The newly elected Swiss parliament needs to be persuaded to reject the „climate protection plans“ of the oil lobby. As an Alpine country particularly at risk from climate change Switzerland has a vital interest in seeing global CO₂-emissions reduced. But Switzerland cannot expect others to take action unless it sets itself ambitious climate goals and then achieves them.

For more information:

- www.greenpeace.ch/de/themen/klima/klima-news-single/archive/2007/may/article/oel-gleich-klimaschutz-entschieden-falsch-1
- www.erdoel.ch
- www.lauterkeit.ch