

From: [Edgar Dearden](#)
To: [Council](#)
Subject: Fossil gas terminology to enhance climate change communication and action
Date: Friday, October 13, 2023 2:55:40 PM
Attachments: [Letter to BC government to use fossil gas terminology in BC.pdf](#)
[Motion to use fossil gas terminology within municipal communications.pdf](#)

To the Mayor and Council,

A decade ago, the looming threat of climate change compelled me to transition from a career in fossil chemical engineering to sustainable architecture. My dedication to climate-friendly practices has been unwavering, albeit underpinned by a belief that we had ample time to mitigate the unfolding crisis. The harrowing heat dome of 2021 drastically altered my perspective.

In its terrifying wake, I adopted a staunch position against any of our clients heating their homes with fossil fuel. So I told them what I thought I was supposed to say: "Don't use natural gas."

Despite discouraging use of "natural gas" and explaining its detrimental environmental impact, our clients' responses varied from perceiving it as "green" to valuing its "natural" origin. In late 2021, three of those clients installed fossil gas heating against our advice, and a fourth fired us outright for merely suggesting that her "natural gas" fireplace was detrimental.

In pursuit of more effective communication, I discovered the term "fossil gas," which we used from 2022 onwards. This term is semantically accurate, as "fossil" denotes carbon sequestered underground from previous geological eras. It is the reintroduction of this sequestered fossil carbon to the atmosphere through burning that primarily contributes to the ongoing planetary heating.

Employing fossil gas terminology catalyzed a notable shift. The majority of our clients in 2022 opted against fossil fuel heating in their homes. Buoyed by this success, I embarked on a citizen science experiment to demonstrate public misunderstanding of "natural gas". I asked 10 strangers in public spaces, "Do you know what natural gas is?", and produced transcripts of the 6 respondents who were unable to accurately define "natural gas" nor link it to fossil fuels.

My request is simple: I am urging governments at all levels to adopt fossil gas terminology. Optimally, this initiative would be led by the provincial government, and I have therefore penned a letter to the Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy.

A simple action you could take to assist would be advocating to the provincial government to adopt this initiative.

A more ambitious action would be a motion to adopt fossil gas terminology in Municipal communication. Such a move would demonstrate leadership to the provincial government. Should they decide to adopt fossil gas terminology, you would benefit from a head start in updating documents. In the meantime, you would be providing a clear and undistorted message to residents and industries alike.

Even in the absence of municipal action, I encourage you personally to integrate fossil gas terminology into your own vernacular. We are fortunate to live in a free country and there is no obligation to label refined fossil fuel products as "natural." By consciously adopting the accurate term "fossil gas" you will exhibit enlightened leadership and foster an informed, conscious citizenry.

Words can indeed be a potent catalyst for change, especially where governmental authority is currently limited, such as in renovations and the elimination of fossil gas from existing buildings.

I extend these requests with profound respect and gratitude. Thank you for your anticipated efforts in advocating for a future that remains habitable for all of us and subsequent generations.

Kind Regards,



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We gratefully acknowledge the land, now known as Whistler and Revelstoke, where we live create and play, in the unceded traditional lands of the Skwxwú7mesh and Lilwat7úl, the Sinixt, Ktunaxa, Secwepemc and Syilx.

October 5, 2023

Honourable George Heyman
Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Subject: Proposal to use fossil gas terminology in Legislation, Documents and Communications.

Dear Minister Heyman,

Greetings and sincere gratitude for your dedication and steadfast service and leadership. Especially in the pivotal role as the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. I had the honor of meeting you at the BC Embodied Carbon Awards¹ earlier this year. You presented my company, GNAR Inc - Sustainable Home Design, the award for the Small Buildings BC (max. 300m²) category. [¹ <https://cifbritishcolumbia.com/embodied-carbon-awards>]

I pen this letter to foster a dialogue on a matter harmonizing succinctly with your mandate and British Columbia's CleanBC roadmap to 2030: the adoption of accurate, unequivocal language to catalyse actionable climate consciousness among citizens.

The specific proposal is to formally integrate the term "fossil gas" in lieu of "natural gas" in province wide legislation, documents and communications.

I have identified both through our Home Design clients, as well as an initiative I took to survey the general population, that many in British Columbia cannot identify "natural gas" as a fossil fuel. Even when I asked the esteemed Mayor Jack Crompton of Whistler to explain this term, he was unable to do so.

Attached to this letter are transcripts of my discussions with British Columbians which demonstrate their inability to associate "natural gas" with its fossil origins. These conversations underscore the confusion prevailing amongst residents due to the current terminology.

Remarkably, as you will observe in Conversation 4, when I asked the person a different question, "Do you know what fossil gas is?", he replied, "No". Yet despite never having heard this term before, when prompted further with, "Can you figure it out?", this individual responded, "Gas that's a fossil fuel?"

It is evident that this simple and effective terminology shift to 'fossil gas' can significantly bolster climate action by advocating for the elimination of fossil fuels.



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The term “fossil gas” is semantically correct as 'fossil' denotes carbon sequestered underground from previous geological eras. It is the reintroduction of this sequestered fossil carbon to the atmosphere through burning that primarily contributes to the ongoing planetary heating.

The tangible impacts of climate change are undeniable, and while we have just suffered the worst wildfire season in our history, British Columbia has been a beacon of progress in implementing strategies and policies aimed at mitigating these impacts and propelling us toward a sustainable future.

Your mandate emphasizes significant points, including executing the CleanBC Roadmap to 2030, aligning policies with B.C.'s 2030 and 2050 legislated reduction targets, and ensuring industrial alignment with net-zero emissions by 2050, all of which are commendable and pivotal.

The use of the term “fossil gas” aligns with several priority areas stipulated in your mandate:

Enhancing Transparency and Education: The term 'natural gas' inadvertently masks the fossil origin and the associated environmental ramifications. By adopting “fossil gas”, we illuminate the truth about its origins and impacts, shaping informed perceptions and behaviours among citizens and industries alike.

Supporting Reduction Targets: Informed citizens, aware of the fossil fuel implications, are more likely to adopt and advocate for alternative energy sources, thereby organically driving the demand and swift adoption of cleaner energy solutions.

Aligning New Industries: Ensuring that emerging industries are congruent with the CleanBC plan and legislated targets necessitates a clear, undistorted communication about the energy sources we are phasing out and the alternatives we champion.

Climate Preparedness and Adaptation: A citizenry that accurately perceives the roots and outcomes of climate change is essential in collectively embracing and implementing adaptation strategies.

Fostering Unity and Commitment: Accurate terminology, endorsed by the government, fosters a unified front, bridging citizens, local governments, and industries through a transparent and aligned environmental dialogue and strategy.

This modest yet potent shift in nomenclature not only amplifies clarity and honesty in our communication but also seeds and nurtures a more grounded and accurate understanding of the environmental implications among British Columbians.

Your leadership, Minister Heyman, could ensure that this simple yet profound change cascades through our policies, dialogues, and collective consciousness, further solidifying B.C.'s stance as a vanguard in environmental stewardship and climate action.

I therefore call on you and the Premier of British Columbia, the Honorable David Eby, to adopt fossil gas terminology in Provincial communications and documents, as well as the requisite pieces of legislation. I have drafted a Private Members Bill that would direct this action. It is a mere two pages, but I believe it will initiate the processes necessary to complete this action within 12 months.

I am available for any further discussions or clarifications on this matter and eagerly await your insights and responses to this proposal.

Thank you for considering this proposal and for your unwavering service to our province and environment.

Kind regards,

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CEO and Founder



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PRIVATE MEMBERS BILL:

FOSSIL GAS CLARIFICATION ACT, 2023

WHEREAS clarity and accuracy in the language used in legislation and government communications are of utmost importance;

WHEREAS the term “fossil gas” is more semantically correct, representing fossil carbon sequestered underground from previous geological eras and its contribution to planetary heating when burned;

WHEREAS the term “natural gas” is misleading and does not accurately represent the fossil origins and environmental impacts of the gas;

NOW, THEREFORE, HIS MAJESTY, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, enacts as follows:

1. Short Title:

This Act may be cited as the "Fossil Gas Clarification Act, 2023".

2. Definitions

For the purpose of this Act:

(a) "raw fossil gas" refers to hydrocarbon gas primarily comprising methane derived from fossil sources, which has not undergone processing;

(b) "processed fossil gas" or "fossil gas" refers to hydrocarbon gas primarily comprising methane derived from fossil sources, that has undergone processing, irrespective of the degree of said processing.

3. Legislative Amendments

(a) The Carbon Tax Act, R.S.B.C. 2008, c. 40, and all other BC legislation that define or employ the term "natural gas", shall be amended by replacing the term "natural gas" wherever it appears with "raw fossil gas", "processed fossil gas", or "fossil gas", whichever is contextually appropriate.

(b) Subsequent BC legislation enacted following the commencement of this Act, which seeks to define or reference methane gas from fossil sources, shall use the terms "raw fossil gas", "processed fossil gas", or "fossil gas" as is contextually fitting.

4. Government Communications

All governmental communications, documents, publications, and official correspondences produced after this Act's commencement that reference methane gas from fossil sources must use the terms "raw fossil gas", "processed fossil gas", or "fossil gas" as appropriate. Pre-existing governmental materials that are renewed or republished should be updated to match this terminology.

5. Review of Existing Legislation

The Attorney General shall undertake a review a review to pinpoint specific pieces of BC legislation that define or employ the term "natural gas". Within 12 months from the commencement of this Act, the Attorney General shall produce recommendations for the necessary amendments to ensure alignment with this Act.

6. Commencement

This Act comes into force on the day it receives Royal Assent.

Transcripts of conversations asking: 'Do you know what natural gas is?'

Conversation 1:

Eddie: Do you know what natural gas is?

Person 1: Gas that comes from the earth naturally

Eddie: Could you tell me more about that?

Person 1: No I don't know

Eddie: Do you know where they get it from?

Person 1: No

Eddie: Do you know what it is?

Person 1: No I don't know, it's a long time since I've been in science class

Conversation 2:

Eddie: May I ask you the question I ask everyone who starts here?

Person 2: Yes

Eddie: Do you know what natural gas is?

Person 2: I don't want to say yes but I don't want to say no

Eddie: Say whatever you think

Person 2: No not really

Eddie: I keep telling everyone that people don't know what natural gas is.

Person 2: I don't think I really know, maybe if I looked it up.

Conversation 3 (two people present):

Eddie: Do you know what natural gas is?

Person 3: I think natural gas is like the actual air gas

Person 4: No, not really. Why?

Eddie: I'm just curious, do you know what it is?

Person 3: I don't know if its like liquid or actual air gas

Person 4: I think it's like a fuel and you like, put it in a tank and burn it?

Eddie: Sure that's close enough

Person 4: Yes, nailed it.

Conversation 4:

Eddie: You seem like an informed fellow, I have a question that I have been asking people, do you know what natural gas is?

Person 5: Natural?

Eddie: Natural gas.

Person 5: Where it actually comes from, or what it actually is?

Eddie: Yeah, what is it?

Person 5: I know it's not propane, but I know it is something similar to it. But, I wouldn't actually know to tell you the truth what actual real natural gas is and where it comes from.

Eddie: That's a perfect, great answer. I'm finding most people don't know.

Person 5: I know natural gas is similar to propane, but I know it is not the same. I know that what we have in our houses is natural. Where they get it from and all that I don't know.

Eddie: Do you know what fossil gas is?

Person 5: No.

Eddie: Can you figure it out?

Person 5: Gas that's a fossil fuel?

Conversation 5:

Eddie: I'm going to ask you a question I ask everyone, is that ok?

Person 6: No problem, go for it.

Eddie: Do you know what 'natural gas' is?

Person 6: Gas that's natural

Eddie: Did you just say 'gas that is natural'?

Person 6: I have no idea! But I'm pretty sure it's gas that is better for the environment.

Eddie: Ok, but what is it?

Person 6: I don't know.

Eddie: Search your memory bank, what do you know about it

Person 6: Do you hook it up to your house?

Eddie: Yes, you hook it up to your house.

Person 6: It's gas that's better!

Eddie: Better than what?

Person 6: Than regular.

Eddie: Regular what?

Person 6: Regular gas. Are they the same thing or not?

Eddie: Like gas that you put in your car?

Person 6: Are you talking about gas that you put in your car or gas gas?

Eddie: When people say 'put gas in your car' they mean gasoline

Person 6: Oh right. So you're talking about gas that doesn't go in your car

Eddie: Well it is confusing, there are vehicles that use 'compressed natural gas'

Person 6: So it does go in your car! So it's like fuel.

Eddie: Yes, it is like fuel. But do you know what it is?

Person 6: I don't know, tell me

Eddie: Natural gas is a fossil fuel. I call it fossil gas.

Person 6: How do they get it?

Eddie: Here in Canada they use this process called 'fracking' or hydraulic fracturing. They drill down under the earth, then fill it with chemicals and blow the frack out of it. All the rock gets punctured which releases the gas, but it can also poison aquifers and groundwater.

Person 6: So it's not good?

Eddie: No its really bad for the environment

Person 6: Why do they call it 'natural'

Eddie: Exactly! Why do they call it natural!?

Person 6: So it f**ks everything up?

Eddie: Yes basically, that is why we have global warming.

Person 6: Oh cool... s**t. That sucks.

Conversation 6:

Eddie: Could you please explain linguistically why this substance is called natural gas?

Mayor Crompton: I don't know the reason it is described that way. I think it is the most commonly used term, and that is probably why we use it.

Eddie: So you don't know why it is called natural gas?

Mayor Crompton: I don't have the etymology of the word, no.

Eddie: I sent a letter to you, proposing that Mayor and Council use an alternative term to natural gas, fossil gas. You opposed that motion, but you are saying that you don't know why it is called natural gas?

Mayor Crompton: Exactly yeah. I don't know the etymology. It is the word that is most commonly used in public conversation, so it's the word that we're using at the table as we discuss it. I think most people would know what you mean when you use the word.

Eddie: In my letter I provided transcripts of conversations with 6 residents, who like yourself Mayor Crompton, do not know what natural gas is. Do you accept that? Do you agree it is possible that many people do not know what natural gas is?

Mayor Crompton: Well I think people know what it is. I don't want to comment on conversations you've had with other people because I don't know them and haven't had the opportunity to speak with them myself.

Eddie: Do you think the term 'natural gas' could be misleading?

Mayor Crompton: It is the word that most people in the world use, so it is the word that we use at this table to talk about something that we want to be able to communicate with each other and understand what we are talking about.

Eddie: Given the escalating climate crisis, and the need for public clarity on environmental issues, do you agree that persisting with outdated, and potentially misleading terms, could hinder public understanding?

Mayor Crompton: I think what we came to is that the most important thing we can do is take substantive action on that and that's where we're spending our time. Increasing our transit service, building better buildings. We've got 6 big steps that we're taking very seriously and that's where we want to focus our time and attention.

Eddie: Right. I notice a bit of a dichotomy because, when discussing my letter, Councillor De Jong said "I don't want council spending any time on semantics", but then when discussing the GHG inventory report Councillor De Jong was like "How can we get people to reduce natural gas?". What I'm proposing is that people in British Columbia do not even realize that natural gas is a bad thing. The term natural gas implies benign, it implies beauty, nature. Do you agree with this sentiment?

Mayor Crompton: Mr Dearden your time is up. No, I think most people know that it is a fossil fuel. And I think that is pretty clear to us as we discuss it.

Eddie: To that point, you say you think people realize it is a fossil fuel. I presented conversations with 6 British Columbians, which was 6 out of 10 of the total that I asked, demonstrating that those 6 people do not know that natural gas is a fossil fuel. Do you dispute that 6 out of 10 people I asked don't know that natural gas is a fossil fuel?

Mayor Crompton: We'll have to end here because we're over time but no, I don't dispute the conversations that you've had.

Eddie: So you agree that natural gas is a misleading term?

Mayor Crompton: Mr Dearden we're at the end of our time. I'm grateful you took the time to speak with us tonight.

MOTION:

WHEREAS the term “fossil gas” is more semantically correct, representing fossil carbon sequestered underground from previous geological eras and its contribution to planetary heating when burned;

WHEREAS the term “natural gas” is potentially misleading and does not accurately represent the fossil origins and environmental impacts of the gas;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Council direct staff to conduct research and investigate the implications and benefits of using the term “fossil gas” in place of “natural gas” within municipal communications and documents;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT staff return to Council with a recommendation on the adoption and use of the term “fossil gas” for municipal purposes, considering the potential for enhanced public understanding and environmental awareness.