

PRESS RELEASE

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SFU's New Responsible Investment Policy Not a Substitute for Full Divestment From Fossil Fuels

Burnaby, BC – Students, faculty and alumni calling for Simon Fraser University to end investment in fossil fuel companies are encouraged by a new investment policy passed by the Board of Governors on June 26th.

"We are pleased the Board has acknowledged the efforts of our campaign in their adoption of the new policy," said Tony Nguyen, President of SFU350, a climate justice club. "However, a commitment to the UN Principles of Responsible Investment and shareholder engagement will not address our primary concerns about the risk and consequences of investing in the businesses causing climate change."

"Politely asking fossil fuel companies to stop warming our climate with greenhouse gases is like asking SFU to stop teaching students. These businesses are not going to quit their primary commercial activity: finding and extracting the dangerous carbon reserves that cause global warming."

The Board's decision came at the end of the warmest three month period experienced since record keeping began in the 1800s. In April, atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide passed 400 parts per million, the highest level in at least 800,000 years and well above the safe level of 350 parts per million.

"Our divestment campaign will continue until SFU's endowment is no longer invested in the businesses primarily responsible for disrupting our climate by extracting and combusting carbon," said Tony Nguyen. "In the coming months, we will continue to engage university decision-makers and demonstrate that in the case of the fossil fuel industry -- which can't help but be destructive and unsustainable -- this policy is a poor substitute for full disclosure and divestment."

The new policy follows a formal presentation to the SFU Board of Governors from campus supporters of fossil fuel divestment in late March. Students urged Board members to increase transparency of the endowment fund's carbon footprint and commit to divesting university holdings in the fossil fuels industry within five years. Board members also received a briefing report written by student organizers, a petition including over 900 signatories, and an open letter supporting divestment signed by 108 faculty members.

In late May, Board members received additional correspondence from a group of students, faculty, staff and alumni reinforcing the Board's duty to ensure transparency and public consultation in the consideration of new responsible investment policies at SFU.

Mike Soron, SFU alumnus and Executive Director of the student society Sustainable SFU, responded to the development: "SFU is celebrating our 50th anniversary in 2015. Today, we have a responsibility to look ahead to the environmental and economic challenges we face over the next 50 years. As an alumnus, clear responsible investment policies and a transparent endowment will help me understand whether donations to SFU are actually worsening the global warming crisis."

A letter from divestment campaigners to the SFU Board commended the new commitments: "In the adoption of this policy, the Board of Governors has acknowledged the value of responsible investment and shown receptiveness to student engagement. We are heartened that we, as a university, may continue to show leadership on this issue, and we encourage the Board to remain cognizant of the community's continued, and thus far unmet, desire for consultation in matters related to the investment of university funds and the transparency thereof. "

"Our governors are now engaged," says Prof. Arne Mooers, an SFU faculty member involved in the campaign,

“and that’s encouraging. But we all know about the relationship between words and hot air, especially words in policies. Noisy, attention-seeking divestment seems the purest form of shareholder activism I can think of and SFU can lead the country on this issue. Let’s get cracking.”

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About Divest SFU

The Divest SFU campaign has a threefold purpose: 1) Increase the transparency of SFU's investments, with particular respect to the extent of its fossil fuel assets; 2) Immediately cease any new investment in fossil fuels; and 3) Commit the university to fully divest from fossil fuels within five years. The campaign is led by a coalition of campus organizations including SFU350, a campus climate justice club, and Sustainable SFU, an independent student society. Endorsers of the campaign include: The Simon Fraser Graduate Student Society, the Simon Fraser Student Society, the Simon Fraser Public Interest Research Group (SFPIRG), several campus clubs and departmental students’ unions, as well as the SFU Urban Studies Program and the department of Resource and Environmental Management.

About SFU Policy B-1016

The new policy binds the Board to striking a new committee to oversee the following directives: to encourage university investment managers to abide by the United Nations Principles of Responsible Investment (UN PRI); and to pursue shareholder engagement to encourage corporate adherence to ESG (Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance) principles.