

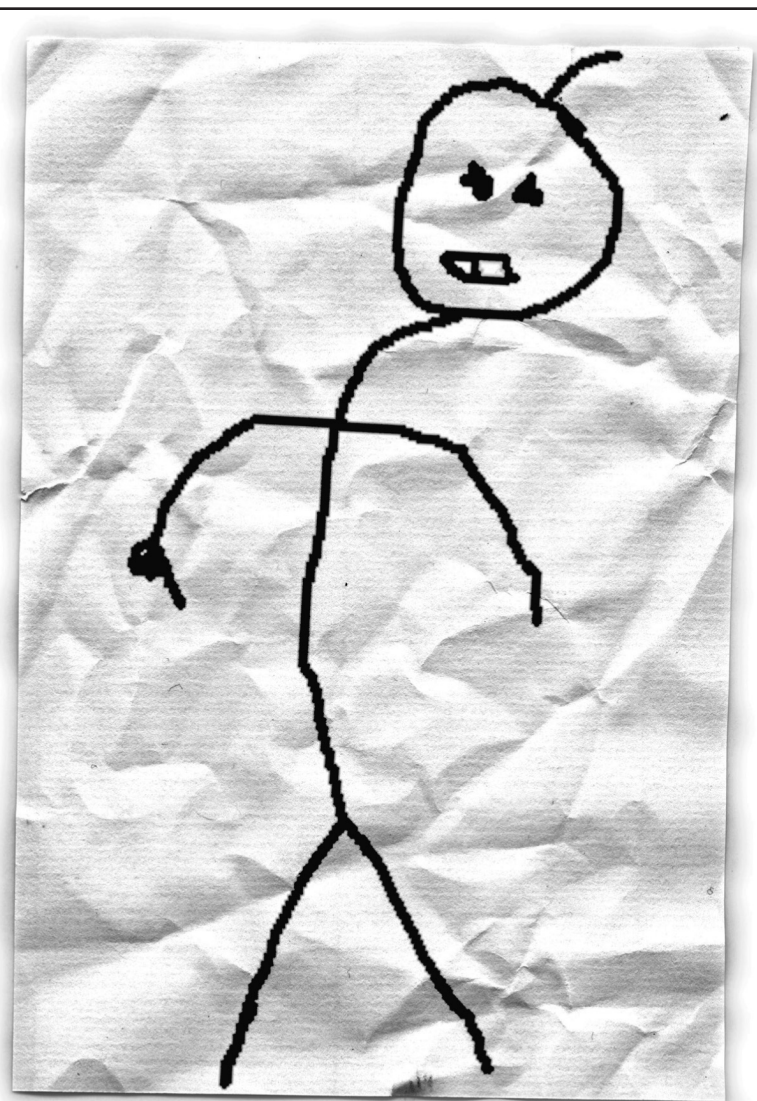
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Gateway Comics: Some Skill Required *

* Skills include: being raised by wolves, dressing provocatively, batting one's eyelashes, discovering wrinkles in time, the ability to save dogs from drowning, turtle-hunting, succumbing to peer pressure, being water soluble, taking a dump and, um, drawing ... if you can't do that other stuff.

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An all-too convenient excuse

Our political and business leaders need to face up to the truth and put the environment ahead of the economy—and it starts with Alberta's oil sands



CHRIS VIARD

There was once a time when it was thought that we could never exhaust our natural capital, simply because there was so much of it. The development of the Alberta oil sands over the last several decades has served to illustrate how wrong that assumption is. Thankfully, Canadians from all parts of the country are getting the message of how critical the state of the environment is, both for our own preservation and, by extension, the overall health of our economy. Simply put, an uninhabitable world is not a friendly place to conduct commerce.

Unfortunately, this message is lost on the business-friendly government of Alberta and the oil companies who are seeking a five-fold increase in oil sands development. In addition to permanently destroying vast boreal forests in what is no less than an open-pit mining operation, the barrels of oil we sell so cheaply serve to undercut the need for conservation in both countries. Why would they reduce their consumption of oil knowing that Alberta is willing to give them all the oil they need, regardless of how much greenhouse gas it produces?

The current sitting in Parliament is a clear indication of how important the environment has become to Canadians. The three opposition parties have even passed a bill requiring the Canadian government to fulfill its

obligations under the Kyoto Protocol, despite Harper's insistence that the goals cannot be met.

Although difficult, these requirements are nothing short of international law, and this country has an obligation at least to try and achieve them. If this requires us to purchase emission credits from elsewhere in the world, then so be it. We can take solace in the fact that our negligence in enacting standards for industry, specifically in Alberta, will at least reduce the amount of carbon dioxide emitted elsewhere in the world by the purchase of credits.

Current production has made much of northern Alberta into an eerie moonscape, where an area the size of Maryland and Virginia combined are forever altered to quench our addiction to oil.

Here in Alberta, a familiar story is unfolding. Premier Ed Stelmach went on television to announce that Alberta will proceed with oil sands development in just the same haphazard manner as his predecessor Ralph Klein. In the same greedy fashion, he pretty much told the rest of Canada to back off of regulation that might make industry responsible to Alberta and the rest of the country. No planning needed—just the assumption that the social and environmental problems

will simply rectify themselves.

Current production has made much of northern Alberta into an eerie moonscape, where an area the size of Maryland and Virginia combined are forever altered to quench our addiction to oil. And let's not forget that the oil companies are destroying whole forests at a remarkable rate in order to get the oil out, so in addition to the higher environmental toll attributable to the production of heavy oil, we also lose the carbon offset afforded by hundreds of kilometres of trees. Take a look at this new Alberta landscape on Google Maps—it's truly staggering.

The Kyoto Protocol is about absolute reductions, rather than the "intensity" targets for increased efficiency espoused by Harper and Stelmach's Conservative governments. If we agree—and most people now do—that we emit too many greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, then nothing short of absolute reductions will suffice.

Intensity targets simply mean that for every barrel of oil produced, there is to be a reduction in the amount of emissions released. This dishonest approach falls apart when we consider that the US and Alberta governments are being seriously persuaded to increase oil sands production five times over.

In a recent article in the *Globe and Mail*, it was estimated that the amount of net emissions under Harper's intensity targets would increase by an astounding 248 per cent (based on 2000 levels) if all the approved projects proceed. I'm no mathematician, but the government's insistence that it plans to deal effectively with global warming is sounding more and more like hot air.

Oh, the Humanities building!



MELISSA PRIESTLEY

"Your caffeine-fuelled, end-of-term freak-out will likely produce far worse symptoms than those described above. However, the fact remains that any increase in CO₂ concentration is unhealthy, and as someone who usually spends several hours every day in this building, I have reason to be concerned."

For those of you who regularly spend time in the Humanities Centre, you may want to think about changing your major.

As you may have heard by now, one of the building's main fans powering the circulation system broke over Reading Week. The system isn't out for good, but it's currently running at only about half-power. This has resulted in patchy, partial heating throughout the building. Some rooms are freezing and drafty, others are hot and stuffy. But have no fear, boys and girls, for the problem will be solved—in a few months.

I can deal with a room that's a little too chilly or warm. Sweaters, for example, are wonderful devices that can be put on or removed as needed. Before the fan went out, many of my classes were already sub-zero, so I haven't noticed too much of a difference. But what I have trouble accepting is the other consequence of ailing circulation: lack of proper carbon dioxide ventilation.

With the system running at half power, CO₂ isn't getting ventilated

from the building as fast as it should, and has therefore started accumulating. Elevated levels of CO₂ in the air can cause numerous effects on the human body, including hypercapnia, which lowers the body's shivering threshold and increases core cooling rate. As you can guess, this messes with the body's temperature regulation, the effects of which will only be intensified in rooms that are already too hot/cold. It can also cause flushed skin, irregular heartbeat, muscle twitches and higher blood pressure. In severe cases, symptoms include disorientation, panic, hyperventilation, convulsions, unconsciousness and even death.

Now I'm not saying that you'll die if you spend time in the Humanities Centre—unless, perhaps, you're a philosophy grad student. CO₂ levels would have to be 40 times higher than they usually are, and you would have to spend prolonged periods of time in this environment.

Your caffeine-fuelled, end-of-term freak-out will likely produce symptoms far worse than those described

above. However, the fact remains that any increase in CO₂ concentration is unhealthy, and as someone who usually spends several hours every day in this building, I have reason to be concerned.

I'm sure you're all sick of hearing Arts students whingeing about how ignored, neglected and/or unloved they are, and how it's unfair that while the Engineers get a big shiny new building, we quietly rot in a forgotten corner of campus. This isn't a plea for a brand new building to call home. It isn't even a plea to replace the falling-apart, baby-shit-orange furniture or burned-out lights in the bathroom—I, for one, enjoy peeing in the dark.

What this is a plea for is a healthy learning environment, with air that's safe to breathe. Seems like a basic right, and one that should be taken for granted—but as this situation has shown, it clearly isn't.

Then again, you could always use the Humanities' crappy circulation as a creative, inarguable excuse for that last D or the odd manic outburst.