



Written by [Rebecca Terrell](#) on April 25, 2022

Why Should You Care About Carbon Capture?

Congress is subsidizing billions of dollars in carbon dioxide (CO₂) harvesting across the United States, in keeping with the Biden administration's net-zero [fantasies](#). Some of the projects aim to trap CO₂ as it is produced by refineries and power plants, a process known as carbon capture and storage (CCS). Its close cousin is carbon dioxide removal (CDR), which involves large machines that extract CO₂ directly from the atmosphere. Both methods aim to store the captured gas underground or in ocean reservoirs.



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Last November the Department of Energy (DoE) announced its "Earthshots" [initiative](#) to promote CDR technology. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm called it a crucial move to "meet the urgent needs of the climate crisis." DoE hopes to reduce the cost of the process, and it plans to expand CDR deployment "at the gigaton scale" to keep up with what forecasting models predict is necessary to achieve "carbon neutrality" by 2050.

Within days of the Earthshots announcement, President Biden signed the \$1.2 trillion [infrastructure](#) bill, passed by Congress — with the invaluable help of 13 Republicans — in support of his "Build Back Better" agenda. Among the legislation's disastrous provisions is \$3.5 billion allotted to development of CCS technology and another \$3.5 billion for CDR. On top of that, \$2.5 billion goes specifically to carbon storage projects, \$2.1 billion to fund low-interest loans to CO₂ pipeline expansion, and hundreds of millions more to support associated federal and state tax-dollar-squandering provisions, according to [JD Supra](#).

Grist [reports](#) that there are around 5,000 miles of CO₂ pipeline in the country, regulated since 1991 by the federal Department of Transportation's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA). Experts estimate between 30,000 and 65,000 miles of pipeline will be needed to achieve government goals.

The measures have garnered a strange-bedfellow mix of opponents. AgWeek [reports](#) that land-owners "fear the inevitable use of eminent domain and the loss of private property rights" in areas where CO₂ pipeline expansion is planned. Public comments on permits in Iowa and South Dakota are "overwhelmingly against the pipeline."

Environmentalists are up in arms, too. The Sierra Club [calls](#) carbon-capture projects "greenwashing schemes" actually intended to promote "Enhanced Oil Recovery" (EOR). EOR pumps the trapped CO₂



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into depleted oil wells to extract more petroleum, a move that activists complain helps perpetuate “dependence on fossil fuels.”

Residents of Satartia, Mississippi, may have the most compelling objections; they learned in February 2020 that CCS comes with life-threatening safety issues. A pipeline operated by Denbury Resources in the hills just outside town ruptured, sending a dense cloud of CO₂ descending on the village. Within minutes individuals began collapsing in their homes. Others tried to escape, but their vehicles “just shut off, since they need oxygen to burn fuel,” [reported](#) HuffPost.

“While ambient CO₂ is odorless, colorless and heavier than air, the industrial CO₂ in Denbury’s pipeline has been compressed into a liquid, which is pumped through pipelines under high pressure,” the article explained. “A rupture in this kind of pipeline sends CO₂ gushing out in a dense, powdery white cloud that sinks to the ground and is cold enough to make steel so brittle it can be smashed with a sledgehammer.”

The incident sent 49 of the area’s 300 residents to the hospital, while most of those remaining had to evacuate. No one died, but an emergency authority said many would not have survived if the disaster had occurred at night while people were sleeping. Residents now live with residual lung, stomach, and neurological problems they never experienced before. Adding to the stress are worries that it could happen again. In fact, another accident spewed even more CO₂ the following October during repairs to the damaged section, causing repeat evacuations. Even now, “PHMSA has yet to release an incident report detailing the cause of the rupture,” [reports](#) Grist.

Mississippi also holds a lesson in the economic costs of CCS. In an [op-ed](#) for *The Hill*, Manhattan Institute senior fellow Robert Bryce cited the Kemper County power plant owned by Southern Company, “a project that aimed to prove feasibility of CCS.” DoE subsidized Kemper in 2010 with \$270 million, but when construction time nearly doubled and expenses more than tripled over original expectations, “Southern canceled the project, sticking ratepayers with about \$1.1 billion of those costs.”

Of completed CCS projects, Bryce explained that all are expensive. “[T]hey require huge amounts of energy to separate and capture” CO₂, and removing “it from flue gas cuts a power plant’s output by as much as 28 percent.” Moreover, “disposing of just 10 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions with CCS would require building an industry as large and sophisticated as the global oil sector — in reverse,” he noted.

Authorities say the price of CCS pales in comparison to CDR. “Climate Experts Say Vacuuming CO₂ From the Sky Is a Costly Boondoggle,” reads a recent *TIME* magazine [headline](#). “The U.S. Government Just Funded It Anyway.” The article describes plans for direct-air capture hubs yet to be built. Each would be “able to pull a million tons of CO₂ out of the air” annually, though “to make a dent in climate change, the world would have to be sequestering thousands of times more carbon dioxide than those projects will.”

Of course, climate experts who have earned the appellation “[deniers](#)” point out that Earth’s climate is impervious to human CO₂ emissions, and that historical records reveal that fluctuations in atmospheric CO₂ follow, rather than lead, those in global temperature. Additionally, far from being a pollutant, carbon dioxide is a “nutrient to life on earth,” [according](#) to the Center for the Study of Carbon Dioxide and Global Change.



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Instead of chasing CO₂ pipeline dreams, Tim Benson, policy analyst for The Heartland Institute, [recommends](#) ending subsidies and tax credits to carbon-capture technologies and removing “detrimental regulations” on reliable energy sources. He points out that “CO₂ emissions in the United States have been relatively flat since 1990” while natural gas consumption has exploded.

Unfortunately, reality is characteristically non-existent among factors considered by the Biden administration and Congress when planning how to spend your tax money.



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