

The Chris Hedges Report with John Vailant, author of "Fire Weather," on the climate catastrophe and the uncontrollable firestorms, each more deadly than the next, incinerating the planet.



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On May 2016 a monster wildfire engulfed the city of Fort McMurray in the Canadian province of Alberta, destroying thousands of homes and forcing the evacuation of 88,000 people. The freakishly destructive conflagration, which tore into town with such speed that residents barely escaped in their cars as their houses flared and vaporized, is a harbinger of the new normal, the kind of climate catastrophe that will become commonplace as the climate heats up and monster storms, heat waves and wildfires proliferate.

Fort McMurray is in the heart of the Alberta tar-sands, one of the largest concentrations of crude oil in the world. The tar sands produce 98 percent of Canada's oil and are the United States' largest source of imported oil. This oil, among the dirtiest fossil fuels on earth, is a leading cause of atmospheric pollution, releasing massive amounts of carbon dioxide. The production and consumption of one barrel of tar sands crude oil release 17 percent more carbon dioxide than production and consumption of a standard barrel of oil.

Tar sands oil is a thick, mucky, clay-like substance that is infused with a hydrocarbon called bitumen. The oil is extracted by a process known as steam-assisted gravity drainage, which occurs under the earth and is similar to fracking. In the norther part of the province, extraction is done by strip-mining the remote boreal forest of Alberta, 2 million acres of which have already been destroyed. The destruction of vast forests, sold to timber companies, and the scraping away of the topsoil have left behind poisoned wastelands. This industrial operation, perhaps the largest such project in the world, is rapidly accelerating the release of the carbon emissions that will, if left unchecked, soon render the planet uninhabitable for humans. The oil is transported thousands of miles to refineries as far away as Houston through pipelines and in tractor-trailer trucks or railroad cars. More than a hundred climate scientists have called for a moratorium on the extraction of tar sands oil. Former NASA scientist James Hansen has warned that if the tar sands oil is fully exploited, it will be “game over for the planet.” He has also called for the CEOs of fossil fuel companies to be tried for high crimes against humanity. Joining me to discuss the suicidal folly of our continued extraction of fossil fuels and the consequences for the planet is John Valient, author of *Fire Weather: A True Story from a Hotter World*.

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