



Why major polluters need kicking out of football

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World Cup 2018 Sprinkler malfunction

With extreme weather and [war](#) wreaking havoc on football in communities around the world, the sport's entanglement with fossil fuels further endangers the game itself, as well as players, fans and everyone else besides.

But it doesn't have to be this way, as a series of recent reports spell out.

Players and pitches in peril

[Player safety](#) has been a hot topic with this year's FIFA Men's World Cup underway. Climate Central estimates that the number of extremely hot June and July days in host cities has [roughly tripled](#) since North America last hosted the tournament in the 1990s. The heat and humidity at most of the upcoming games will [impair players' performance and present serious health risks](#) even for athletes in their prime.

This World Cup has been forced to adapt for example, with later game scheduling and [hydration breaks](#). But as temperatures soar and pitches flood around the globe, climate impacts will end up defining when, where, how and even if future tournaments can happen safely.

The extreme weather climate change brings has already been [highly disruptive](#) to amateur sports: an estimated 120,000 grassroots football matches are cancelled each year in England alone.

JÃ©my Houssin, one of the authors of [Football for Future](#)'s & [Common Goal](#)'s recent [Pitches in Peril](#) report, summarises:

Climate change is no longer a distant warning – it is already reshaping football, from grassroots pitches to iconic stadiums, from community football to major competitions. Hazards are escalating, and not all places face them equally.

The most destructive World Cup yet

Despite the climate threats football faces, the current World Cup is adding more fuel to the fire than ever before. Research led by Scientists for Global Responsibility highlights how the expanded tournament and all the air travel baked into its design has made it the [most polluting ever](#).

It's expected to cause nearly double the climate damage of recent World Cups, driving the equivalent of over 9 million tonnes of CO₂ emissions. Staggeringly, this is higher than the annual reported emissions of at least [sixty entire countries](#)

FIFA has been heavily [criticised](#) for partnering with highly-polluting sponsors such as Coca-Cola, Qatar Airways and the Saudi Arabian company Aramco.

Explaining why Aramco's involvement is a particular concern, Frank Huisingsh of [Fossil Free Football](#) writes:

Aramco continues to expand fossil fuel production despite UN warnings that its activities undermine the Paris Agreement and violate human rights. Being 98.5% owned by the Saudi government, Aramco is deeply linked to the state's strategy to build soft power and block climate action.

Another recent report, [Football and Climate Change](#) documents how football has been captured by fossil fuel interests for decades. Integrating evermore deeply into the game has served to promote unsustainable products and lifestyles, whilst laundering the reputations of the world's worst polluters and human rights abusers.

The authors explain:

For every petrostate or oil magnate that buys a football club, for every event or club sponsored by a fossil fuel company, and for every airline logo on the stomach of our favourite players, the hegemony of fossil capital becomes that little bit more embedded.

The beautiful game?

Each of these reports released to coincide with this World Cup emphasise the huge potential of sport – football in particular – to lead by example and catalyse positive changes across society. According to the [Football and Climate Change](#) report, democratising and 'degrowing' elite football are key to making this happen.

They [recommend](#) a series of interventions that limit fossil fuel influence, such as banning major polluters from hosting, sponsoring or advertising at tournaments. Calls for much higher environmental standards and effective enforcement of them are echoed across multiple campaigns.

Campaigners also encourage players to organise and advocate for the changes they want to see. Despite reports that professional players are often [discouraged](#) from communicating about sustainability, Women's World Cup players [set a precedent](#) for speaking up that [others are now following](#)

Football fans around the world would benefit hugely if even a fraction of the [enormous sums of money](#) involved in tournaments like the World Cup were redistributed to grassroots sports. This would enable teams and venues to adapt to climate impacts, to become [more sustainable](#) and to welcome more people in, becoming incubators for the sports stars of the future.

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By [Abi Perrin](#)

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