



**WHEN
WORDS
COLLIDE
2025**

August 15-17, 2025

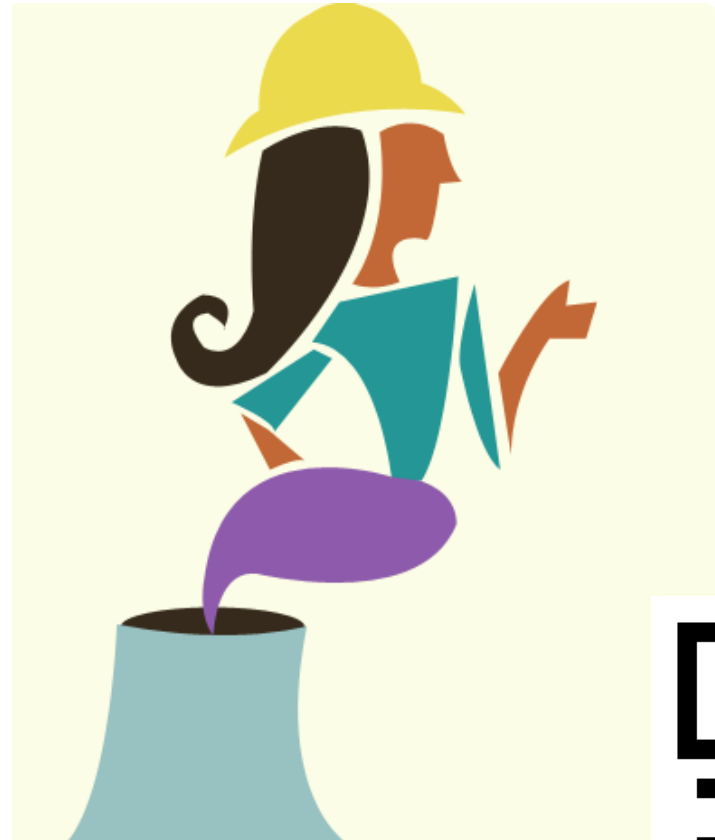
Sheraton-Cavalier, NE Calgary

Writer vs. Climate: The Artist's Role in Shaping Cultural Conventions about Energy

**Grace Meikle, spec fic writer &
cleantech advocate**

August 17, 2025

About Me



**Writer vs Climate
newsletter** (plus
links to short stories
and magnets):



Agenda

- About the topic + warmup activity
- What to get out of this session - Discuss real world examples from media & literature that feature climate and energy
 - How do they do it?
 - Are they effective?
 - Are they accurate? Does this matter?
- Other examples you'd like to share? From your own writing?
- Some examples of exciting new energy & climate techs happening in Alberta!



In what ways do climate and energy appear in literature?

- As a central plot element
- As a convenient plot device
- As an element of setting or atmosphere
- As a theme, whether underlying or central to the story
- As a symbol or allegory contributing to theme
- As an element of worldbuilding/future energy paradigms
- As a call to action



Warm-up writing activity

- Pick an energy/climate topics from the below (or any others if you like) and write a 1 liner story idea that features the topic:
 - Hydrogen locomotive
 - Micro-nuclear reactor
 - Agrivoltaics (farming and solar co-existing)
 - Lithium extraction
 - Mining landfills
 - Wildfire detection
 - Extracting minerals from tailings ponds



Examples from media & literature that feature climate and energy – how do they do it?





7 Things The Simpsons Got Wrong About Nuclear

Here are 7 things The Simpsons missed about nuclear energy.

[Office of Nuclear Energy](#)

May 13, 2025

 4 min



09/26/2022 · S2, E8 · 26 MIN

Pop Culture and Nuclear's PR Problem The Climate Challengers

► Play

Show notes:

- [2:09] Find out just how misleading the depictions of nuclear power are on TV's The Simpsons
- [4:10] The ways in which radioactive materials are safely handled by OPG employees
- [9:05] Whether you can eat donuts at a nuclear reactor
- [10:50] The depiction of nuclear technology in 1950s era science fiction and horror films
- [11:40] the use of nuclear technology as a plot device in Hollywood
- [12:50] The conflation of nuclear power and nuclear weaponry in film, TV and the public imagination
- [21:00] OPG's plan to correct the record and recast nuclear as the hero of the story in the climate change era

The Simpsons may affect view of nuclear plants: prof

The Canadian Press · Posted: Dec 21, 2009 8:47 AM MST | Last Updated: December 21, 2009



S1-E4

How The Simpsons Got Nuclear Wrong with Zion Lights

Fissionary



00:00

1x

Full Screen

00:00

SUBSCRIBE



Discussion: the Simpsons

- The Simpsons is the longest running animated and primetime US TV series
- It is a parody with intention (or promise) of technical accuracy:
 - Nuclear waste is a solid, not a liquid, and it isn't green or stored that way
 - Nuclear plants are subject to stringent safety regulations and have hundreds of staff, whereas Homer is often portrayed operating the plant alone
- The show nonetheless takes a decidedly negative stance on nuclear energy, pitting it against environmental advocacy, and has had a massive impact on shaping social conventions around nuclear energy:
 - The nuclear plant where Bart works is depicted with numerous safety violations
 - Homer Simpson is depicted as incompetent; the plant's owner is depicted as a villain
 - Homer's daughter Lisa is portrayed as an environmental advocate opposed to the plant
- The US and Canadian nuclear industries have spent decades and millions trying to change the social conventions created by the show



**Used nuclear fuel:
valuable resource or toxic
trash? (Energenie, 2017)**



**What's the worst possible
nuclear accident?
(Energenie, 2016)**





Discussion: The Glass Onion

- Sequel murder mystery to “Knives Out” feat. several A-list actors (2022)
- Hydrogen is a central element of the plot as well as the setting; the movie seems to have an implicit “hydrogen-skeptical” stance:
 - The villain tech billionaire has developed a solid hydrogen clean fuel and seems to be bypassing safety risks
 - He casually carries around a sample of said fuel in his pocket
 - The film’s climactic scene involves a hydrogen explosion that also destroys the Mona Lisa
- The movie’s portrayal of hydrogen has technical inaccuracies, but also alludes to valid risks associated with hydrogen (i.e. need for improved storage methods, explosion safety)
 - Hydrogen cannot easily be put in a solid form and it’s not possible to carry in your pocket
 - Hydrogen does come with some explosion risk, but so does natural gas



THE MINISTRY FOR THE FUTURE

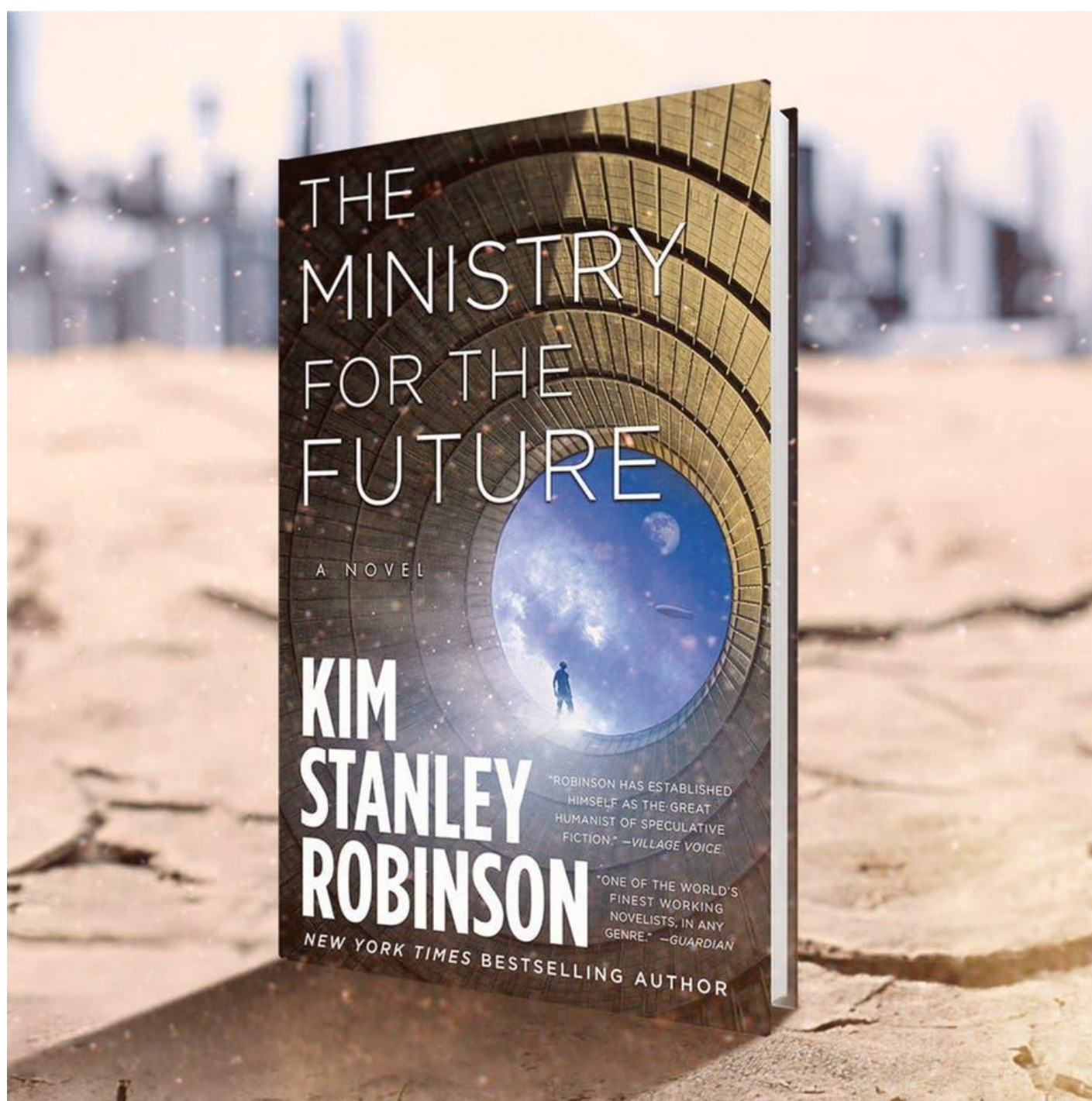
A NOVEL

**KIM
STANLEY
ROBINSON**

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

"ROBINSON HAS ESTABLISHED
HIMSELF AS THE GREAT
HUMANIST OF SPECULATIVE
FICTION." —VILLAGE VOICE

"ONE OF THE WORLD'S
FINEST WORKING
NOVELISTS, IN ANY
GENRE." —GUARDIAN



Discussion: Ministry for the Future

- Multi-POV “hard” cli-fi set in the near future
- Climate and energy serve as both the setting and central plot elements
 - Discusses the impacts of climate change around the world, as well as individual, local/municipal, national and international responses, including technology solutions as well as social, economic and political ones
 - The MC, Mary Murphy, spearheads a new “Ministry for the Future” established to pursue global environmental policies acting in the interest of future generations
 - An opposing character, Frank May, becomes an eco-terrorist after experiencing a catastrophic heat wave in India caused by climate change
- While the novel takes position on numerous issues that not everyone may agree with, it is meticulously researched and its portrayal of climate & energy issues is comprehensive and detailed



DUCKS

Two Years in the Oil Sands



By New York Times #1 bestselling author

KATE BEATON

Discussion: Ducks

- Autobiographical comic about a female Nova Scotian new grad's 2 years spent working in the Alberta oilsands to pay off college debt
- The novel is a brutal, accurate firsthand account, albeit ~20 years out of date (given the setting in 2005-07)
- The author (or her publisher) made a deliberate choice to name the novel "Ducks":
 - "Ducks" is a reference to a well-known catastrophic environmental incident in which hundreds of ducks died after landing in an oilsands tailings pond
 - Energy and climate are the setting and a theme of the novel; but themes of loneliness, isolation, and sexual violence are arguably more dominant



“The Engineer”

(Capital City Press, 2024)

My short story about a woman’s
experience on an Alberta oil rig
(audio version also available)



**My Goodreads review of
DUCKS by Kate Beaton (2023)**



NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

ALIX E. HARROW



STARLING HOUSE

"Alix E. Harrow is an exceptional, undeniable talent."

OLIVIE BLAKE, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE ATLAS SIX*

Discussion: The Starling House

- Modern gothic horror set against the backdrop of a dying coal town in the US south
- Energy and climate are a key part of the setting and theme:
 - The “villains” are part of the coal company and keep trying to convince the MC to compromise her values
 - One of the main characters, the MC’s younger brother, suffers from asthma due to the coal plant’s poor emissions management
 - The “haunting” “horror” is ultimately connected to the coal plant’s environmental impacts
- This is not a technical novel, and it doesn’t try to be – but the spirit of the subject matter is authentic and nuanced



Discussion

- What formats (movies, TV shows, literature) and/or genre(s) are most effective at communicating on energy and the climate, and why?
- Do some genres or forms of art have more of a responsibility for accuracy than others? Why?
 - Accuracy vs authenticity vs. cherrypicking
- Do you have any other examples you'd like to share, perhaps from your own writing?



Takeaways from a a writer, scientist and climate advocate

- Words have power. Many people's views and values are influenced more by media and literature than they are by a corporate podcast or fact sheet.
- We authors have an ethical responsibility, especially when talking about complex, nuanced issues in energy and climate. Don't cherry pick research points.
- Art is flexible, dynamic, comes in many forms that don't always rely on technical accuracy. There isn't a perfect way to do this – but as an artist, you should write with authenticity, as you should with any topic outside your expertise. Consider the impact your writing might have.
- When necessary, talk to experts and do your research!



New energy & climate technologies in Alberta

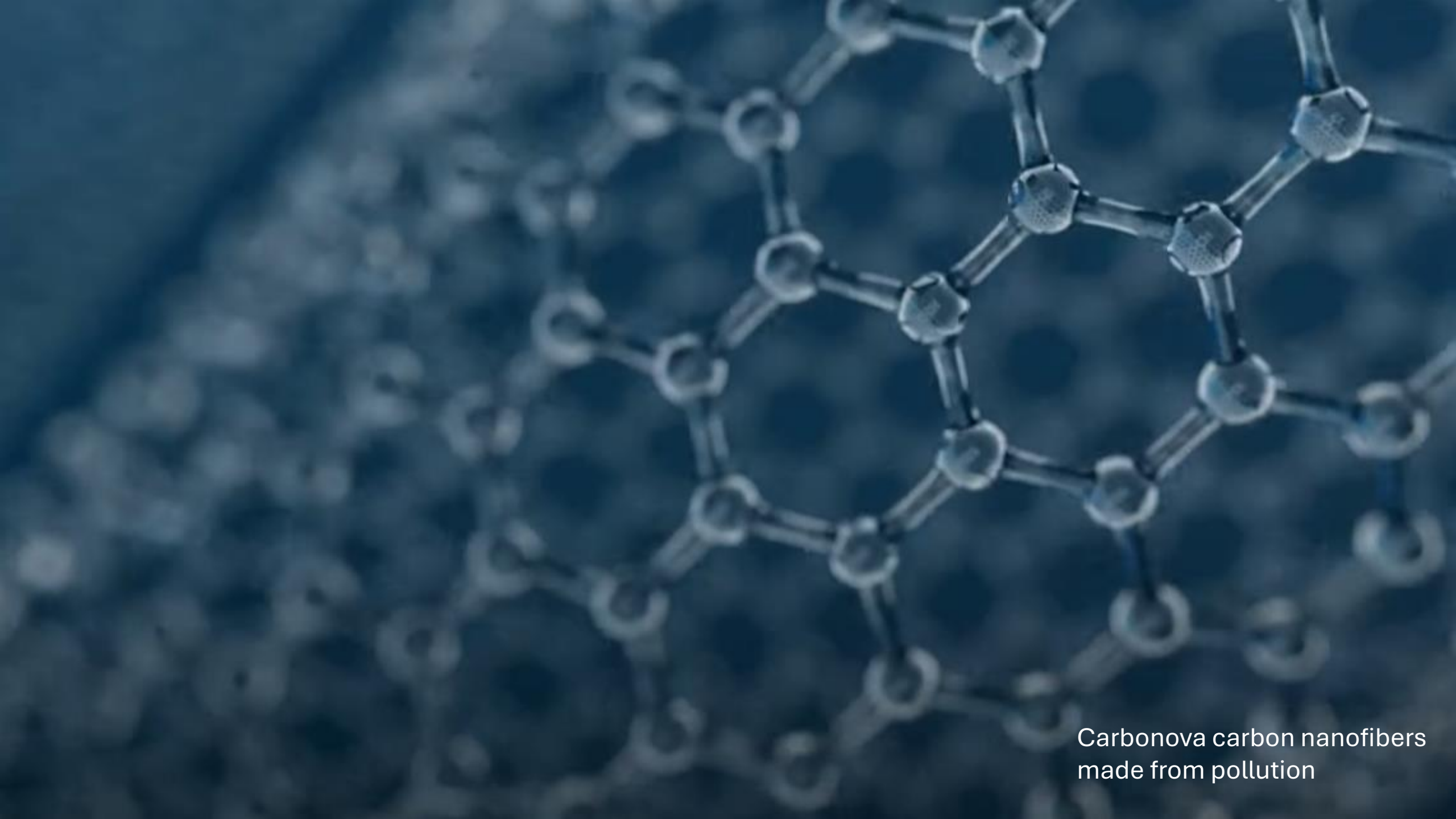




CP Rail Hydrogen Locomotive



Svante next generation carbon
capture technology



Carbonova carbon nanofibers
made from pollution





Direct Air Capture unit in Innisfail,
Alberta at Deep Sky's test center

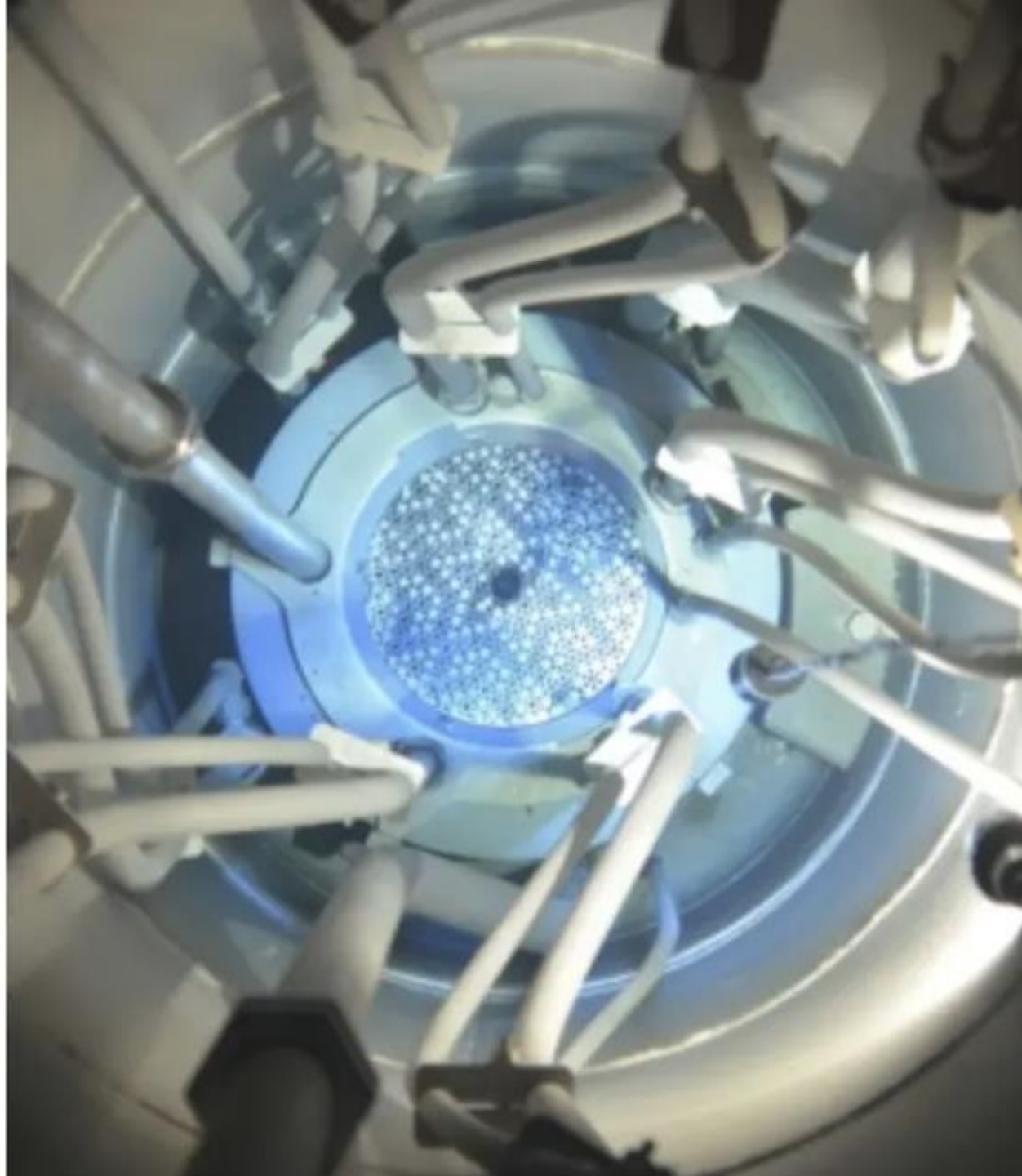




Forestry companies clearing brush to protect towns from forestry that can be used to make clean energy



SLOWPOKE research reactor that produces medical isotopes & could be deployed in remote communities



Thank you! Any questions?

Newsletter Signup – Writer vs Climate



Slides uploaded on my website
(this also contains link to
newsletter and all stories and
blogs if I gave you too many QR
codes)

