



## Evaluating Offshore Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)

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*This factsheet was last updated on 26 June 2026*

### What is this factsheet about?

This factsheet provides a guide to evaluate offshore carbon capture and storage (**CCS**). The stages of the CCS process are described, and a number of the potential risks and impacts to the environment and human health are summarised.

#### Outline

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## What is CCS?

CCS is a process that takes relatively pure carbon dioxide (**CO<sub>2</sub>**) from different sources to a storage location for long-term isolation from the atmosphere. The process of storing CO<sub>2</sub> (**CO<sub>2</sub>** throughout) offshore involves capturing a stream of CO<sub>2</sub> from industrial and energy-related sources. The CO<sub>2</sub> is separated, conditioned, and compressed for transport by pipelines and injected at a site offshore, deep underground (Geological storage or geosequestration)<sup>(1) (2)</sup>.

## CCS as a climate mitigation tool

CCS is a type of carbon management technology (**CMT**) that has been proposed as a way of capturing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from industrial processes and power plants to avoid their release into the atmosphere<sup>(3)</sup>, thereby mitigating anthropogenic climate change.

A schematic of the different types of CMT is shown in Figure 1:

Carbon dioxide *removal* (**CDR**) takes *existing* CO<sub>2</sub> out of the air, CCS and the related processes of carbon capture and utilisation (**CCU**) and carbon capture utilisation and storage (**CCUS**) capture CO<sub>2</sub> – either in processing, or pre- or post-combustion of fossil fuels - *before it's released into the atmosphere*.

A subcategory of CCUS is called enhanced oil recovery (**EOR**). During EOR operations, also known as CCUS-EOR, CO<sub>2</sub> is pumped into depleted oil and gas reservoirs where it 'sweeps' the reservoir, allowing more oil to be extracted. Some of the CO<sub>2</sub> injected is returned with the oil, but a proportion remains stored in the subsurface to be stored<sup>(4)</sup>.

The International Energy Agency (IEA) initially stipulated that CCS was essential in the array of methods to bring global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions down<sup>(5)</sup>, but they have subsequently tempered their support for CCS<sup>1</sup>. The IEA analysis of global CCUS projects indicates that it is not on track: "the pipeline of current projects is around 40% of the Net Zero Scenario requirement in 2030"<sup>(6)</sup>, with current operating CCS almost stalled at 50 Mt CO<sub>2</sub> (50 million tonnes) annually. This is orders of magnitude below the 'large-scale' Gigatonnes (billion tonnes) of CO<sub>2</sub> required to be sequestered each year to 2050<sup>(6)</sup>. The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) in reviewing the latest IEA information can only see a "minimal role" for CCUS in reducing emissions by 2050<sup>(7)</sup>.

The Global CCS Institute defines 'large-scale' storage as 400,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per annum, or 800,000 tonnes per annum for a coal plant<sup>(8)</sup>. Currently, about 1 MtCO<sub>2</sub>/yr can be injected into a sequestration well, if everything goes well, and an estimated 7 – 8Gt CO<sub>2</sub>/yr needs to be stored by 2050 to keep global temperatures below 1.5°C. Therefore, at least 7000 wells would be needed to keep global warming to 1.5°C – that is an average of 300-400 wells per year<sup>(9)</sup>. While there are many "successful" demonstration projects for CCS

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<sup>1</sup> For example – <https://www.iea.org/reports/net-zero-roadmap-a-global-pathway-to-keep-the-15-c-goal-in-reach/a-renewed-pathway-to-net-zero-emissions> [2023 update]; <https://www.iea.org/reports/world-energy-outlook-2025/net-zero-emissions-by-2050> [2025]

technologies, few large-scale projects have performed as planned due to technical difficulties.

### **Capacity for climate mitigation**

CCS projects have a history of under-performing. A 2022 IEEFA report analysed the performance of 13 operational large-scale CCS projects worldwide, which together represent 55% of captured CO<sub>2</sub>, using figures published by the companies. The report concluded that 10 out of the 13 projects have captured far less CO<sub>2</sub> than expected <sup>(10)</sup>.

For example:

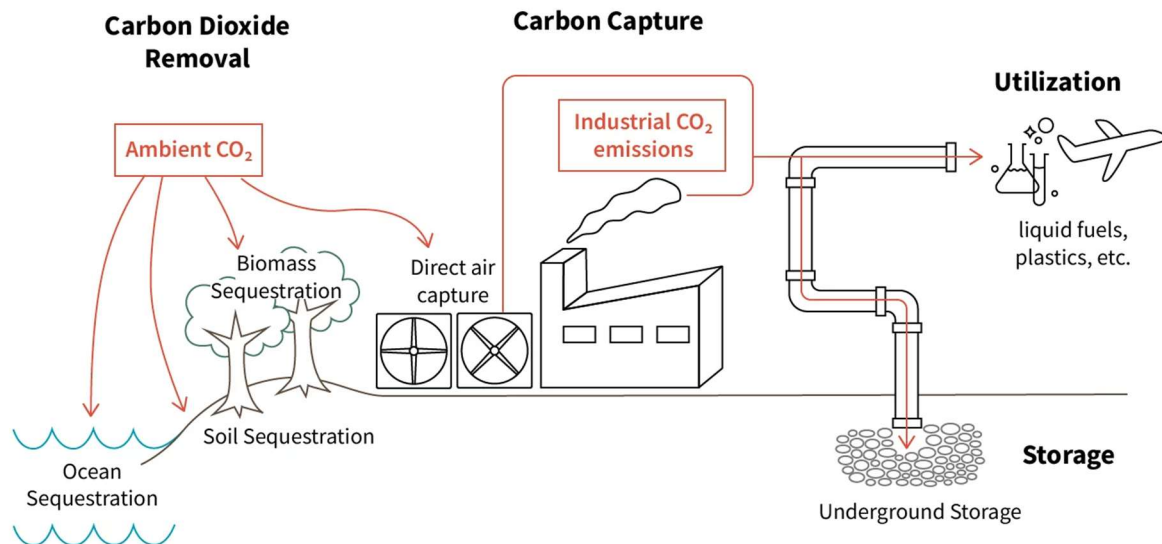
- The Gorgon project operated by Chevron in Western Australia promised to reduce scope 1 CO<sub>2</sub> from LNG production by around 40% over the life of the system <sup>(11) (12)</sup>. Chevron initially claimed that as much as 80% of the total separated CO<sub>2</sub> would be stored <sup>(10) (9)</sup>. Instead, the project was delayed by 3.5 years and missed its target by more than 50% due to unforeseen engineering challenges <sup>(10) (12)</sup>. At this rate, less than 3% of the project's total GHGs (including scope 3 emissions) are being currently stored. Over the life of the project, CO<sub>2</sub> storage will be less than 6% of total emissions, even with perfect implementation<sup>2</sup>.
- In the U.S., ExxonMobil's Shute Creek facility near the LaBarge field in Wyoming has underperformed by roughly 36% <sup>(10)</sup>.
- Petra Nova in Texas missed its carbon capture targets by about 17% upon starting its operations <sup>(13)</sup>, and ultimately captured just 7% of its total carbon dioxide emissions before being shut down in 2020 <sup>(14)</sup>, at a cost of US\$65/tonne of sequestered CO<sub>2</sub> <sup>(15)</sup>.
- The Kemper "clean coal" project in Mississippi was long delayed, and construction was eventually abandoned in 2017 <sup>(10)</sup>.
- The world's only operating power plant with CCS – Boundary Dam in Canada – has captured about 50% fewer emissions than planned (10), at a cost of US\$110/tonne of sequestered CO<sub>2</sub> <sup>(15)</sup>.
- The In Salah project in Algeria was a CCS project that failed after a decision was made to suspend injection due to concerns about possible vertical leakage into the caprock <sup>(9)</sup>.

Although the Sleipner and Snøhvit subsea fields in Norway have been cited as success stories, they cannot be used as definitive models for the future of CCS due to the unpredictability of the subsurface conditions, which began deviating from design plans 18 months into CO<sub>2</sub> injections, necessitating major interventions <sup>(16)</sup>. While the Sleipner CCS project sequesters 1 MTCO<sub>2</sub>/year from an offshore gas treatment facility "the process of flow between adjacent sedimentary layers, separated by mudstone layers, remains unclear" despite years of detailed, expensive seismic monitoring of the reservoir <sup>(9)</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Perfect implementation would be 3.4 MTCO<sub>2</sub>e sequestered out of 59.2MTCO<sub>2</sub>e per year. Chevron, 'Gorgon Gas Treatment Plant Greenhouse Gas Management Plan' (August 2022) 14 <https://australia.chevron.com/-/media/australia/our-businesses/documents/gorgon-gas-treatment-plant-greenhouse-gas-management-plan.pdf>

Although CO<sub>2</sub> is the primary GHG emitted during combustion of fossil fuels, they are not the only GHGs emitted during the fossil fuel production life cycle and these other GHGs are not removed from the emissions by CCS facilities. Therefore, approval of new fossil fuel production projects has the potential to increase emissions despite CCS facilities.



**Figure 1.** Types of carbon management technologies. Image source: [Carbon Management | Understand Energy Learning Hub](#).

### Lifecycle emissions and net climate change impacts

For each tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> sequestered, a minimum volume of CO<sub>2</sub>-e is emitted over the lifecycle of the storage. All stages of the process require energy, or fuel, to operate and therefore produce greenhouse gas emissions additional to those being stored. The Australian Clean Energy Regulator (NGER) includes in its determination of CCS emissions; the operations required to capture greenhouse gases, processing or compressing of the gases, transportation and injection of the gases to the storage, and fugitive emissions from pipeline and storage leaks<sup>(17)</sup>.

This fuel requirement is called the CCS “energy penalty”. For example, the energy penalty for CCS to abate the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by the 1493 coal-fired power plants in the US would be an additional ~400–600 million tonnes of coal per year or building an additional ~100 GW of CO<sub>2</sub>-free baseload power (i.e., to compensate for the reduced efficiency of the plants due to CCS)<sup>(18)</sup>. Most CCS projects address emissions only for one stage of the energy production life cycle. For example, the CCS facility at Gorgon was designed to remove only the amount equivalent to reservoir CO<sub>2</sub>, while an almost equal amount of CO<sub>2</sub> was associated with the production facility.

The main contributor to GHG emissions from CCS (i.e., Scope 1 & 2 emissions) is the energy generation for the processing stage of the CO<sub>2</sub>, and fugitive emissions<sup>(19)</sup>:

- Capture. Amine scrubbing is a common and long-used capture method that involves a liquid solvent, amine solution, used to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from flue gases,

thereby purifying and capturing up to 90% of CO<sub>2</sub>. This is an energy-intensive process because heat is required to regenerate the amine solvent and release the CO<sub>2</sub>.

- Compression. Energy is required to change the CO<sub>2</sub> from a gas to a liquid, and that liquid CO<sub>2</sub> is further compressed to reach an optimal flow condition for pipeline transport.
- Transport. Fugitive emissions are a risk associated with CO<sub>2</sub> pipeline infrastructure, and the risk increases with transport distance. Using the limited available records from the USA PHMSA for release volumes, during the period 2002-2009 the average release volume of natural gas was approximately 782,000 cubic metres per pipeline leak/incident<sup>(20)</sup>. Sub-sea isolation valves can significantly reduce the volume of gas released by isolating the leak within a few minutes. Without sub-sea isolation valves, leaks could be prolonged and release large volumes of gas.

As described above, GHG emissions are possible through all steps of the CCS process. Leaks can also occur during all steps, and even a minor leak can nullify the effects of CCS. As such, it is important to understand the regimes governing the monitoring and remediation of leaks in the near- and long-term.

## Uncertainty and risk of CCS processes

The uncertainties and risks of CCS are assessed in sequence: carbon capture; CO<sub>2</sub> transport; and CO<sub>2</sub> storage (geosequestration):

### Carbon capture

Despite significant research efforts<sup>3</sup>, carbon capture is locked operationally into a decades-old technology of amine liquid-phase capture<sup>(21)</sup>:

- Amine scrubbing of CO<sub>2</sub> is energy intensive and risks escape of air pollutants (e.g., nitrosamines)
- Most operational CCS projects are associated with CO<sub>2</sub> capture from raw gas processing (gas or LNG plants) because amine scrubbing is most efficient with gases having high-CO<sub>2</sub> content, such as reservoir CO<sub>2</sub> in raw gas, but it falls away with CO<sub>2</sub> levels in post-combustion exhausts (e.g., fossil-fuelled power stations).
- Amine scrubbers are also the most water intensive method due to the additional cooling water requirements<sup>(22)</sup>. Rosa (2020)<sup>(23)</sup> found that the “water efficiency” of CCS (the amount of water used per unit of CO<sub>2</sub> captured) depends on the type of fossil infrastructure and the corresponding capture technology. The water footprint of CCS ranges from 0.74 to 575 cubic metrics of water per ton of CO<sub>2</sub><sup>(24)</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> For example – Cousins, A., Feron, P., Hayward, J., Jiang, K. and Zhai, R., 2019. *Further assessment of emerging CO<sub>2</sub> capture technologies for the power sector and their potential to reduce cost*. CSIRO report EP189975 (for IEAGHG), CSIRO, Australia.

## Transport

The preferred transport of CO<sub>2</sub> is pipelines, although ships are being actively developed (e.g., Norway's Northern Lights CCS project <sup>(25)</sup>). Transporting CO<sub>2</sub> in a pressurised state comes with risks, and experience to date with CO<sub>2</sub> pipeline infrastructure (mostly in the USA) has been primarily for enhanced oil recovery (EOR). Gas composition and recovery methods for CCS will vary due to the range of industries for which CCS aims to capture and sequester CO<sub>2</sub> <sup>(26)</sup>. This is likely to result in a range of impurity levels in different CO<sub>2</sub> sources, and higher impurity levels than those encountered in EOR.

Pipeline transport risks:

Corrosion of pipeline materials was identified as the leading cause of historical pipeline failure in the Gulf of Mexico <sup>(27)</sup>.

- When the gas is not adequately dehydrated or water enters the pipeline, CO<sub>2</sub> and impurities, in particular hydrogen sulfide (H<sub>2</sub>S) and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), can form acid and result in pipeline corrosion <sup>(28)</sup>. Impurities in the gas (non-CO<sub>2</sub> compounds) add complexity to pipeline transportation and need to be considered in pipeline design <sup>(29)</sup>.

Offshore pipeline failures:

For offshore pipelines, a unique set of additional risks need to be considered and mitigated.

- Offshore natural gas pipelines have had higher failure rates than onshore pipelines. An analysis of failures recorded in the USA Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) database for offshore natural gas transmission and gathering pipelines between 1990 and 2009 showed that there were 346 significant incidents during this period <sup>(29)</sup>. Of these incidents, 59% were leakage incidents, 17% were ruptures incidents, and the remaining were system-component failures (such as valves, joints, and welds).
- Storms and cyclones can cause physical damage from storm generated waves, debris, seabed scouring caused by strong currents, and turbidity currents caused by cyclones <sup>(30)</sup>. The strong currents induced during storms, particularly cyclones and hurricanes, can scour unconsolidated sand on the seabed from beneath marine pipelines. This can leave sections of pipeline unsupported and result in subsidence and strain on the pipeline joints. Conversely, pipelines can be buried by sediment. Modelling of storm-scour and incorporation of sufficient stabilisation mechanisms into pipeline design can mitigate for these risks but come at increased cost <sup>(30)</sup>.
- Axial walking, caused by thermal expansion and contraction of pipeline infrastructure when transmission is turned on and off, can place stress on joints and connecting parts of the pipeline <sup>(31)</sup>.
- Laying pipelines offshore is inherently more challenging than onshore, and with increasing depth there is increased risk of welded joints being stressed <sup>(26)</sup>.

## Storage

CO<sub>2</sub> storage involves injection of CO<sub>2</sub> into the subsurface, typically to a depth of 1 – 4 km<sup>(32)</sup>. Usually, it is injected into a permeable sedimentary rock that is overlain by a low permeability mudstone or shale that acts as a caprock (**Figure 2**). In Australia, the two most applicable reservoirs for CO<sub>2</sub> storage are depleted oil/gas formations and saline aquifers<sup>(33)</sup>. Based on technical feasibility alone, 225 Gt of CO<sub>2</sub> could be sequestered underground in Australia by 2050, although as of 2021-2022 only an estimated 1.7 Mt per year of actual geosequestration is occurring<sup>(33)</sup>.

Successful long-term storage relies on stable thermodynamic conditions and structural integrity of the reservoir. However, these conditions are not consistent within a formation or among formations. The criterion for choosing a suitable saline aquifer includes the depth of the reservoir, the capacity for the pores in the caprock to hold fluid or let it pass through (permeability), and the integrity of the caprock<sup>(34)</sup>, and whether the brine and rock minerals have the correct chemistry to create the chemical actions required to mineralise the CO<sub>2</sub>. Ensuring the safety and stability of the CO<sub>2</sub> storage remains the biggest challenge in this field of research, making site selection critical, as well as the method and rate of injection<sup>(9)</sup>.

Structural failure risks:

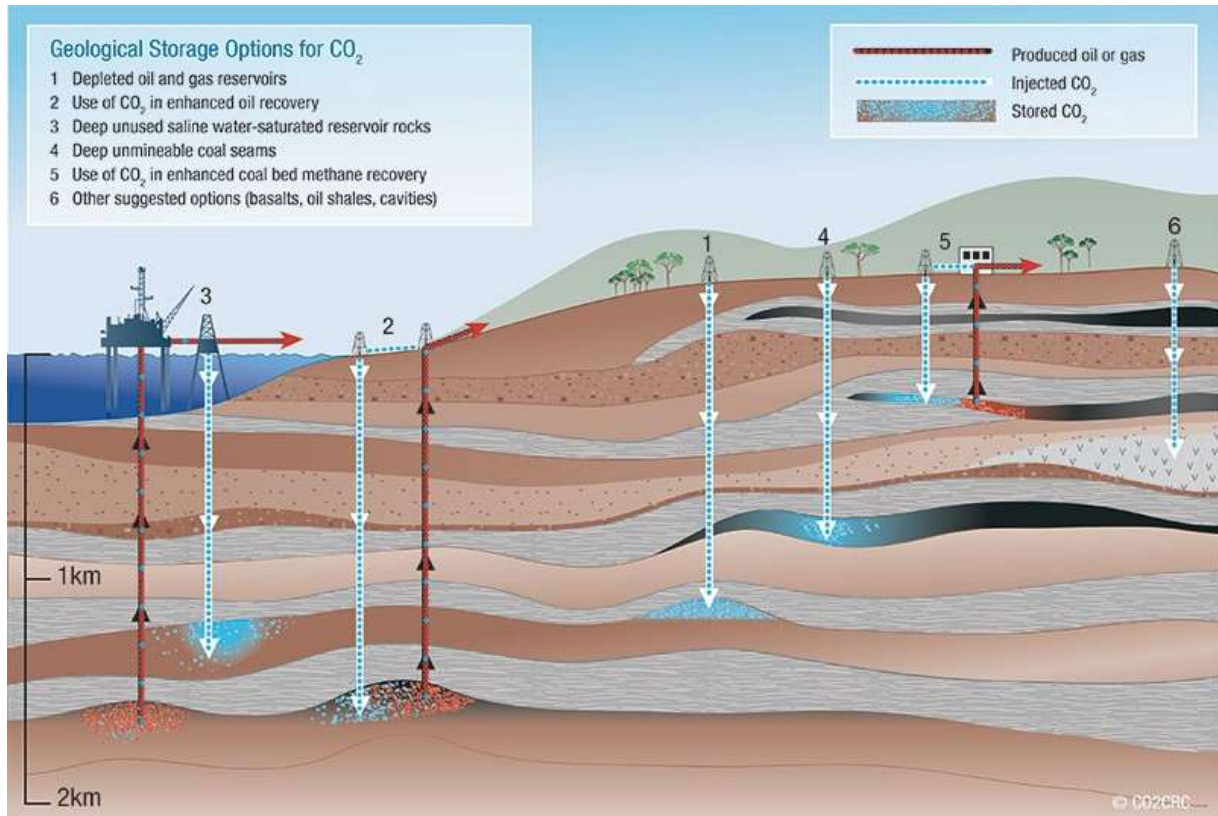
Absolute reliability of long-term (millennia) geosequestration of CO<sub>2</sub> is unverifi-ed/-able. Risks of losing CO<sub>2</sub> from geological storage have been well studied and documented<sup>(35) (36) (37) (38) (39)</sup>. Known hazards include caprock fracturing, migration along fault lines, groundwater contamination, failures in well integrity, and induced seismicity, as well as earthquake rupture of the geological formation.

Thorough geotechnical site characterisation, a conducive policy environment, stringent regulation, monitoring, and multi-decadal investment commitment are key to geological CCS being conducted safely, achieving the desired injection volume, and minimising risk of CO<sub>2</sub> escaping the reservoir<sup>(40)</sup>.

- At any location and depth within a geological formation, there is a pre-existing stress field. This depends on factors including the depth of the formation (the weight of overlying rocks and sediments creates gravitational stress), and the tectonic setting (plate movement creates stress, depending on the direction of motion)<sup>(41)</sup>.
- The stress field within the reservoir and seal rocks at a CCS site change during CO<sub>2</sub> (or any fluid) injection, because of pressure build up and structural changes to the pores trapping the gas<sup>(42)</sup>. Changes to the stress field can cause existing faults to slip or new fractures to develop, cause movement along the interface between geological layers (bedding-plane slip), create induced seismicity, and even result in uplift, whereby the rocks themselves are moved upwards.

- Chemical reactions between the CO<sub>2</sub> and fault material can also decrease the stress threshold required for slip <sup>(43)</sup>. Mechanical failure of the reservoir or seal rock can occur if a fault penetrates the entire seal.

**Figure 2.** Schematic of the different types of onshore and offshore geological storage options for CO<sub>2</sub>. Image credit: Orr, F., 2009. Science <sup>(44)</sup>.



## CCS as Enhanced Oil Recovery

Many existing CCS projects globally have been designed with the goal of extending the life of fossil fuel extraction sites. These projects facilitate Enhanced oil recovery (EOR; also called Improved Oil Recovery, IOR)<sup>4 (45)</sup>. During the EOR process, slugs of water and CO<sub>2</sub> are alternately injected into a subsurface reservoir, pushing oil in the reservoir toward an oil production well (Figure 1). Thus, while conventional methods of oil production typically only remove 20-40% of the oil from a reservoir, an additional 30-60% can be extracted by EOR <sup>(45)</sup>.

Oil reservoirs and depleted gas fields:

- Storage methods <sup>(46)</sup>: Previous extraction of oil and gas can create extra capacity in the reservoir pressure (pressure headroom) to operate before weakness occurs in

<sup>4</sup> This process is equally appropriate for use in producing gas and condensates; therefore, Enhanced Hydrocarbon Recovery (EHR) is perhaps a better term, yet EOR is the most commonly used term in the literature. Thomas, 2008. Enhanced Oil Recovery – An Overview. Oil & Gas Science and Technology, 63(1); 9-19. <https://ogst.ifpenergiesnouvelles.fr/articles/ogst/pdf/2008/01/ogst07042.pdf>

the structural integrity of the reservoir. This headroom enables some CO<sub>2</sub> to be returned to the reservoir in the form of CO<sub>2</sub> processed to a compressed liquid form (supercritical).

- Geological suitability <sup>(10)</sup>: These fossil fuel fields have been well-studied, and the infrastructure (e.g., well integrity) is known and used from decades of CO<sub>2</sub> extraction. However, monitoring of these sites is critical for the assessment of additional risks associated with aging infrastructure, and they should be evaluated with the same criteria as the saline aquifers.

## Marine Ecological Risks and Impacts

Marine impacts relate to potential problems associated with equipment failures, leaks and geological instability of chosen storage sites. These problems can release CO<sub>2</sub> and other toxic and hazardous pollutants that are produced during the CO<sub>2</sub> processing stage, such as benzene and derivatives, monoethanolamine or other amines, and mercury <sup>(47)</sup>.

Primary risks and impacts include, but are not limited to:

- Catastrophic and rapid loss of containment from pipeline, injection site (blowout), or reservoir- or land-based infrastructure <sup>(48)</sup>.
  - Asphyxiation risk near population centre or habitat (e.g., shorebirds)
  - Carbonic acid formation lowering pH, impacting coral and skeletal formations.
- Slow CO<sub>2</sub> leaks alter the sea's carbonate buffering system, creating changes in microbial communities, aquatic vegetation, and fauna communities <sup>(49)</sup>. These impacts vary with the depth, flow, and temperature of the surrounding seawater.
- Disturbance or destruction of fragile habitat and communities on the seafloor from dredging, trenching, and pipelaying <sup>(50)</sup>.
- Repeat seismic surveys to find and monitor stability of the reservoirs, impact marine mammal and food-chain organisms <sup>(51; 52)</sup>.
- Monitoring of sediment clouds (plumes) from mining activity requires ongoing time lapse (4D) seismic surveys, setting chronic pressure on the marine mammals and food-chain organisms.
- Pollutants that are toxic and hazardous to the environment are produced during CO<sub>2</sub> processing and can persist in marine sediments, including but not limited to hydrochloric and hydrofluoric acid, nitrous and nitric acids, sulfurous and sulfuric acids, hexafluoroethane, cadmium, mercury, thallium. The release of these into sediments can occur through infrastructure failure <sup>(53)</sup>.

## Public Health Impacts

The negative health, environmental, and environmental justice impacts from the upstream extraction as well as the burning of (and export of) oil, gas, and coal include, but are not limited to: groundwater contamination, toxic dust production, and methane releases from coal mining; toxic chemical releases to air, water, and from oil and gas drilling operations; methane releases in the fracking and transport of natural gas; particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds, and nitrogen oxides

emissions from burning coal and gas; groundwater and drinking water contamination from coal ash, the toxic byproduct of coal burning<sup>(54)</sup>.

**Air pollution** impacts from the proposed buildout of CCS infrastructure is one of the major concerns for environmental justice communities. Environmental justice advocates argue that instead of transitioning away from facilities that emit hazardous air pollutants, CCS will only prolong the life of these facilities without removing the non-CO<sub>2</sub> air pollution<sup>(55)</sup>. According to a report by the European Environment Agency (EEA) on the air pollution impacts from CCS, air pollutant emissions (e.g., nitrous oxides, sulfur dioxide, ammonia, non-methane volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter) could increase due to the additional combustion of fossil fuels associated with CCS<sup>5</sup>. At existing facilities with CCS, air pollution reduction has not been demonstrated. Jacobson (2019) found that the CCS-retrofitted coal power plant in the Petra Nova project had a 25% increase in air pollution compared with no CCS<sup>(56)</sup>.

The main source of **water pollution** is from post-combustion CCS facilities that use amine scrubbers. The water pollution arises from amine wastewater from reclaimers<sup>(57)</sup>, and poses a moderate to severe threat to human health and ecological systems. Amine wastewater can increase the toxicity to freshwater ecosystems by ten times<sup>(58)</sup>. Scrubbing chemicals, in particular alkanolamines, are emitted in traces in water vapor into the environment<sup>(59)</sup>. These traces can contaminate and degrade water through precipitation and run-off. Amine wastewater also degrades over time to produce other toxic and hazardous (carcinogenic and mutagenic) compounds<sup>(57)</sup>. Amine risks include: cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, cancer, and premature death.

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<sup>5</sup> See pages 21 and 24 in EEA, Air pollution impacts from carbon capture and storage (CCS), (2011), available at: <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2800/84208>.

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