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False allegations pollute the well of public discourse

By Peter Robinson

At the David Suzuki Foundation, we pride ourselves in finding science-based solutions to the real and urgent challenges of our time. But we sometimes find ourselves responding to allegations based on lies and exaggerations. Some of our supporters have asked if recent claims made by Sun Media host Ezra Levant are accurate. We think you deserve clear and truthful answers.

For starters, please note: David Suzuki is not the head of a corporation. The David Suzuki Foundation is a registered Canadian charity and David Suzuki has never been a paid staff member. In fact, he is one of our most generous donors and volunteers. He has lived in the same house for decades, a home he has shared with his in-laws and in which he has raised his daughters.

As for the claim that David owns land with an "oil company", we did what journalists are supposed to do before running a story. We checked with the company's owners, a couple living on the Sunshine Coast. They told us the husband's father ran the company in the 1950s and '60s to distribute oil to households and small businesses, mostly for furnaces. When the company folded, they used the assets to buy into co-owned land on remote Nelson Island, and it has not operated as anything other than a holding company since the late 1960s. David and a friend, who knew nothing about the company, bought into the property many years ago with the express purpose of protecting it from development. He has made other investments in real estate to provide for his retirement and family.

We would also like to take a moment to set the record straight: Although Sun Media consistently refers to David Suzuki as a saint, he isn't. He has received many awards and honours, including being named a Companion of the Order of Canada, but he has not been sainted or knighted, and he's human, not infallible. He's a 77-year-old grandfather who has devoted his life to communicating the wonders of science and finding solutions for our shared environmental problems. But mostly he's a human doing what he can to make a positive difference.

We find it strange that anyone would be opposed to protecting the air, water, land and biodiversity that we need for our health and survival, but recent attempts to tarnish the reputation of David Suzuki, as well as the Foundation and other environmental groups, show that some people view short-term profit for the fossil fuel industry as more important than protecting the planet.

Those not familiar with Sun News host Ezra Levant — who also founded a propaganda organization and website to promote the fossil fuel industry and target environmental groups — might be interested to know he has been proven in court to be less than credible, with a judge in one case ruling that he spoke in "reckless disregard of the truth." In fact, he's currently facing another in a string of libel charges. He's also had to apologize publicly for rants and comments that were deemed racist and has been found in violation of the Canadian Broadcasting Standards

Council's ethical guidelines. He doesn't believe in the science of climate change, thinks recycling is "pointless" and believes Canada should put all its economic eggs in the oil sands basket. Many of his attacks are ad hominem — that is, they are aimed at perceived flaws in an individual's character rather than his arguments — and most are blatantly false.

He appears to take issue with the fact that David Suzuki has been rewarded for his many well-earned successes as a prolific author, scientist, speaker and host of the popular and long-running TV show *The Nature of Things*, among other accomplishments.

We at the David Suzuki Foundation appreciate that in the current media environment, some outlets operate under the assumption that allegations don't need to be true; they just need to be plausible. So we may need to occasionally respond to mud-slinging and political rants. But we continue to hope the negative noise will be drowned out by positive and rational discourse aimed at creating a healthy, sustainable future. We'd also like to thank all of those who stand with us, and who see through the lies and keep working to protect our planet, even while vocal interests are doing everything they can to undermine those efforts.

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<http://www.davidsuzuki.org/blogs/panther-lounge/2013/10/false-allegations-pollute-the-well-of-public-discourse/>