

How Accurate is the Viral Scene on Energy in Paramount's Hit Series *Landman*?

"Landman" is a great watch. The series centers around Tommy Norris, played by Arkansas native Billy Bob Thornton, working as a landman in western Texas for the fictional M-TEX Oil company. In real life, the job of a landman is to secure drilling and mineral rights leases for energy companies, namely oil and gas.

They are often the public face of these companies when speaking to landowners about leasing rights to explore and develop the energy resources on the land. Beyond this, these professionals may be tasked with negotiating deals and trades with other companies, drafting contracts and ensuring compliance, and making sure leases and operations are compliant with government regulations.¹



In some cases, like Thornton's character on "Landman," this may be a "Company Landman" who works directly for an energy company. In other cases, this might be an "Independent Field Landmen" who is contracted by companies.

Across the country, there are thousands of landmen working every day. The American Association of Professional Landmen (AAPL), an organization that promotes "the highest standards and ethics of performance for all land professionals," has nearly 12,000 members.²



Members of the AAPL have [commented](#) that parts of the show are fairly accurate.

For example, landmen are “master communicators” and taking dozens of phone calls a day (like Thorton’s character, Norris, does) is a reality of the job.³ Or, in the fourth episode, when Norris explains the optimal price of a barrel of oil for oil companies today, he says, “\$78 a barrel, that’s about perfect... brings enough profit to keep exploring, but don’t sting as much at the pump.” That \$78 figure might be a little high, but it’s within reason.⁴

However, “Landman” is still a TV show and it distorts certain facts to create a good narrative. For example, Norris is often made to be the “fixer” for his company and takes on responsibilities well beyond the scope of a real-life landman’s role. Such creative license isn’t unusual in Hollywood, but sometimes viewers may mistake a good show for one that is based entirely on the truth, especially when feeling connected to characters makes people see themselves as part of the same social group,⁵ which can then lead to accepting falsehoods from those characters more easily.⁶



One particular scene went viral in late 2024 and stirred up debates about fact vs. fiction in the energy sector. [The scene](#) (warning: contains adult language)⁷ features Norris giving a monologue on wind turbines. In it, Norris makes several claims about wind turbines and wind energy, along with statements about oil. Because the clip gained so much attention, it’s worth unpacking Norris’s statements to find out what is true and what just makes for good television.



Wind turbines are “400 feet tall.”

The average hub height - the distance from the ground to the center of the rotor - for a wind turbine is 339 feet⁸, but turbines can be as tall as 459 feet⁹, so saying “400 feet” is a fair statement when generally discussing height.

A turbine’s concrete foundation covers “a third of an acre” and goes down “12 feet.”

In terms of acreage, foundation types vary, but a large turbine’s foundation typically needs an area with a diameter between 68.5 feet¹⁰ and 80 feet¹¹. This equates to less than one-third of one-third of an acre (3,685 to 5,026 square feet). However, even if the foundation itself is smaller than “Landman” says, turbines can’t be placed too close to one another¹², so they still need a lot of land. In addition, a 6 MW turbine would require a foundation of 11.25 feet¹³, so saying 12 feet is not too far off.

In a windmill’s “20-year” lifespan, a turbine will not offset the carbon footprint of making it. (due to the diesel needed in the manufacturing, transport, assembly, and maintenance processes, and the amount of oil needed to lubricate and winterize a turbine during its operation).

Research on wind turbines’ carbon footprint that considers all the factors Norris mentioned doesn’t support his conclusion. Studies from 2016¹⁴, 2019¹⁵, and 2024¹⁶ showed that, depending on its size, a turbine can offset its carbon footprint within as little as 64 days to, at most, 1.7 years. In addition, 20 years is the bottom end of a wind turbine’s lifespan. Researchers have found the average to be 29.6 years.¹⁷

If the whole world decided to go electric tomorrow, we don't have the transmission lines to get the electricity to cities; "it would take 30 years if we started tomorrow."

It is no secret that improved transmission infrastructure would give wind (and solar) energy a significant boost.¹⁸ For the entire U.S. to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, a recent study¹⁹ stated it would require an "immediate, large-scale mobilization of capital, policy and societal commitment, including at least \$2.5 trillion" and three to five times the current transmission capacity would be needed. Plus, building transmission lines involves getting a lot of stakeholders - utility companies, regulators, landowners - on the same page.²⁰ In short then, Norris isn't too far off from the truth - it would take 25 years and not 30 - and he doesn't even mention the herculean effort it would take.

"Oil is in everything," including roads, tires, tennis rackets, refrigerators, lipstick, antihistamines, cell phone cases, heart valves, clothing that isn't made from animals or plant fibers, soap, hand lotion, garbage bags, fishing boats, and "pretty much anything plastic."

It may be in everything, but the intent of Norris's statement is true. More than 6,000 everyday products are manufactured using petrochemicals in some way.²¹

Getting oil out of the ground is the most dangerous job in the world.

Fortunately or unfortunately, this is incorrect. Worldwide data is difficult to find, but in the United States in 2018, logging was the most dangerous job in the world in terms of fatalities (111 per 100,000 workers); derrick operators (those who rig hoisting equipment and operate pumps) in the oil, gas, and mining industry saw 46 fatalities per 100,000 workers.²² In 2023 in the United States, the transportation and warehousing sector overtook logging with 1,454 fatal injuries, whereas mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction saw 113 such injuries.²³ This isn't to say that drilling oil is not highly dangerous, but it might not be the most dangerous job. In addition, the dangers of the oil industry seen in "Landman" led the American Petroleum Institute to run ads challenging the show's portrayal of the oil industry.²⁴



If oil companies thought that wind turbines were the future, they would be building them everywhere.

Oil companies have made investments in wind (and solar) power generation, mainly to power their own facilities, such as offshore drilling sites²⁵ and renewable diesel projects.²⁶ Shell initially invested in offshore wind facilities in Texas and Massachusetts, but has pulled out²⁷ of these in recent months.²⁸ Exxon reported record profits from oil recently and, in 2023, the CEO stated that this was proof that the company made the right choice in sticking with fossil fuel production instead of investing in renewables.²⁹ As it stands now, oil companies are continuing to see more profit in their existing strategy, so it looks like Norris is correct on this one.



Overall, the scene from "Landman" is a great piece of acting, but it is mainly that - acting. In some places, it gets the facts right, especially that oil companies still see profit in sticking with oil. But in other areas, like the carbon footprint of wind turbines, it misses the mark. Whatever the case, so long as viewers tune into the eventual season two for the storyline and not for facts, "Landman" is sure to entertain.

End Notes

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