

The Devastating Effects of Corporate Irresponsibility

Corporate irresponsibility leads to environmental and cultural devastation. This has been happening in the Amazon for the last 48 years. In 1964 Chevron (Operating under the brand of Texaco) discovered that a remote northern region of the Ecuadorian Amazon known as the Oriente held valuable oil underground. For the next 26 years Chevron harvested that oil at the expense of the people, animals, lands and cultures of the Amazon Rain Forest. In 1990 when the company left Ecuador, they left their operation to be run by the ill-equipped Ecuadorian oil company Petroecuador, who continued to perpetuate the environmentally hazardous practices introduced by Chevron. They also left behind 18 billion gallons of toxic waste water that had been pumped into the rivers, 17 million gallons of spilled crude oil, and hundreds of open toxic waste pits dug into the ground. ("About the campaign," 2000). Going against their own environmental safeguard policies, best practices for drilling, and legally mandated precautions that they abided by in the United States, Chevron recklessly contaminated an area in Ecuador the size of Rhode Island with mass amounts of toxic waste left over from the harvesting of underground oil deposits. (Amazon Defense Coalition, 2012) Chevron had even patented a technique for safe reinjection of produced wastewater that would have protected the ground water from contamination but chose not to use their own techniques because it was going to take away from their profit margin.

By choosing economic gains over safe environmental practices Chevron showed no concern to the effects their drilling would have on the indigenous people of the Amazon. After years of suffering the consequences of toxic waste contamination the Ecuadorians united to file suit against Chevron to force them to clean up their mess. In 1993 30,000 Ecuadorians filed a class action lawsuit against Chevron in New York. Seven years later the US courts sided with Chevron's first objection to any ruling from a US court, and ruled that the case should be held in Ecuador. Then in 2002 an appellate court upheld the case's move to Ecuador and stipulated "As part of this decision, Chevron is bound to abide by any judgment for or against it in an Ecuadorian court. Because of this, a ruling against Chevron in Ecuador will be enforceable in the United States" ("Chevrontoxico: The campaign," 2000). When the case was re-filed in Ecuador its legal system required more investigation into the actual environmental and humanitarian damage. After 2 years of inspections, from different expert scientists working for the plaintiffs, Chevron, and an independent court appointed group, evidence showed severe contamination at many of the sites left by Chevron. Even with these inspections and a ruling by the Ecuadorian courts that Chevron must pay \$18 billion for the environmental clean-up the oil company refused to comply and filed an appeal. Then in 2011, "Ecuadorian appellate court upheld a historic \$18 billion award against Chevron for the company's deliberate contamination of the Ecuadorian Amazon. For a second time, in a jurisdiction of its own choosing, Chevron was found guilty of widespread oil contamination in Ecuador's Amazon." (Amazon Watch, Rainforest Action Network, 2011). As the judgments of Chevron's guilt continue to be handed down, Chevron continues to appeal in Ecuador and in the US, insisting that it is not responsible for the contamination clean up and that the judgments are based on fraudulent testimonies. As recent as this month, Chevron's fight to avoid paying the \$18 billion owed to the

Ecuadorian people was hit with another judgment by a US appeals court. An earlier order to block Chevron from the responsibility of paying the judgment was lifted. (Shan, 2012) Every major battle in this long legal pursuit for justice has been lost by Chevron, yet Chevron still refuses to comply with court judgments.

By refusing to claim responsibility for the toxic disaster they created in Ecuador, Chevron is refusing to acknowledge that its actions caused harm, and death, to the indigenous people of Ecuador. The same rivers Chevron dumped its waste into were the rivers the community bathed in and used for their drinking water and irrigation. The exposure to the toxic chemicals dumped in the water, and that seeped into the ground from the unlined waste pits, were known to cause hazardous health issues. The people of Ecuador have suffered major medical problems such as blood poisoning, brain, stomach, liver, and kidney damage, repertory problems, cancer, miscarriages, birth defects and ultimately death to some because of the reckless disregard for human and environmental life shown by Chevron.

This disregard for human life, and the land that sustains and supports that life, is what inspired the creation of multiple humanitarian and environmental activist organizations to stand up and support the fight of the Amazonian indigenous people against Chevron and other corporations that want to take advantage of the people and resources of the area. [Amazon Watch](#) is one such organization. As a non-profit organization, Amazon Watch was founded in "1996 to advance the rights of the indigenous people of the Amazon Basin" ("Amazon watch: A,"). By building a partnership with indigenous and global organizations they campaign to persuade key global decision makers to honor the people and land of the Amazon over the capitalistic gains gotten through threatening vulnerable areas and populations. They strive to educate the local and global community about what has and is happening in the Amazon in hopes that people will realize that irresponsibility leads to contamination, which ultimately can lead to death. Death to the land is death to the people.

Death by oil is what my sculpture *ChevronToxico* (2012) is about. This artwork was created in response to learning the plight of the Amazonian people, and Chevron's total disregard for the indigenous people and environment of Ecuador. Layers of acrylic, wax, wire and sticks symbolize the layers of toxic contamination and the multi faceted effects of Chevron's reckless actions. The foundation of the board is coated with colors reminiscent of what is found in the oily sludge that contaminates the land. Remnants of trees struggle to escape the weight of the poisonous oil. Figures are trapped in the oil. Struggling to free themselves from the toxic slick only results in their continued deterioration. A trinity of ancestral spirits project through the mounds of wax as if immersing from the oil covered Amazonian ground. All three in different stages of deterioration: with out sight or sound, yet hoping to be seen and heard.

ChevronToxico is my way of letting the world see the devastating effects of irresponsibility and disregard for the very environment that sustains our global community and to hear the voices of the marginalized. The Amazonian Rainforest and the rivers that run through it are vital to the global climate and water supply. When it is contaminated and destroyed so are we all. Hopefully, as more awareness of this inhumane contamination, decimation and injustice builds it will instigate more action towards corporate and personal responsibility, accountability and preservation of our global community.

Resources

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