

WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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When Will We Ever Learn

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Like many of us, I watched television scenes of the seas of the Gulf of Mexico turning from a blue-green sheen with pounding waves to a dark sluggish sticky mess as the oil gushed from the wells of a British Petroleum oilrig. When I thought about the enormous long-term environmental disaster looming in the Gulf of Mexico, I was reminded of the lyrics of a song, *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?*, written by Pete Seeger and Tao Rodriguez-Seeger almost 50 years ago. Many of us remember lyrics in this song, “when will we ever learn?”

When will we ever learn that our corporate greed and consumption habits lead us to tragedies like this? We see signs all around us showing the impact of our disregard for the fragile environment that we are charged to take care of. Yet we can’t seem to make the connection from individual behaviors to this grave world crisis. We do not seem to acknowledge that environmental regulation is needed to preserve our planet and the surrounding universe.

We should have learned 21 years ago from the horrible oil spill off the coast of Alaska near Valdez. Today, Alaska residents grieve with those in the Gulf Coast region. They know the huge impact of such a spill, something they continue to live with day after day. Thane Miller, a commercial fisherman who helped clean up the Exxon Valdez disaster says, "It's pretty

obvious that in the 20 years since the oil spill, while the people here in this community and the communities around Prince William Sound may have learned things, nobody else has learned anything. Try as you might, you cannot clean up a mess like this."

Alaskans share that no matter how much equipment and money you throw at the clean up, it will never be the same. We can’t yet imagine the horrendous impact of the damage to the creatures of the sea, the land, and the forest. All these years later, oil continues to seep into the grounds and waters off the Prince William Sound. We can surely expect the same result off the coastal regions of the Gulf of Mexico.

When these events occur, it is our responsibility to learn from them. It is our responsibility to be aware of our past mistakes and correct them so that they don’t repeat themselves. All the creatures affected by the Exxon spill in Alaska learned the hard way that government restrictions were gravely inadequate. It is obvious that British Petroleum did not have adequate safeguards in place in the Gulf of Mexico to prevent this disaster. It doesn’t appear as if anyone even knows how to stop this oil leak. When will we ever learn?

We need to learn more about how to change our behaviors. We could recognize that our lifestyle affects the whole environment. We could reduce our dependence on oil. We could be more involved in changing public policies that have a deep negative impact on our environment. We could listen to the experts. **Ceres** is the largest national coalition of investors, environmental groups and other public interest organizations working with companies to address sustainability challenges. The following website gives background and steps to action. <http://www.csrwire.com>.

To learn is not enough. For the sake of our children and their children, we must act now before it’s too late.

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