

Know what you're buying – social implications

EARTH FIRST

By Haidee Nelson, ECCO



A father in the Ecuadorian Amazon, where crude oil has been irresponsibly extracted, tells of his first child dying at 6 months when his son's body stopped developing. His second child died within 24 hours after drinking water from the local river. The father is not alone with his story. Children are developing health problems and dying young. An extreme proportion of people are also developing cancers. Texaco (now Chevron) had been extracting oil there in a manner that was damaging to the health of the environment and the people that lived in it. These people are suffering so that we can fill our cars with petrol and we have no idea!

The plight of these Ecuadorians is detailed in Joe Berlinger's documentary *Crude*. It follows the story of the class action law suit that was filed against Texaco by 30,000 Ecuadorians in 1993. The case still has not been resolved. Chevron has operations all over the world and in 2008 made a profit of \$23.93 billion. Despite this profit they still have not done anything to begin rectifying the environmental and health problems in Ecuador.

I walked out of the cinema after watching *Crude* feeling inspired by the Ecuadorians pursuit for justice but also infuriated by Texaco. However, after initially being angered at the oil company, I soon found myself thinking about the petrol I use to drive my car. Where does it come from? Is it extracted with social and environmental responsibility in mind? I also have a moral obligation as a consumer.

Crude illustrates the difficulties that have evolved from living in such a globalised world. We have no idea how what we do and what we buy affects the people that are directly associated with the production system.

Principle 8 from The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992 declares that "To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all

people, states should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption...”

Labels such as Fair Trade make it easier to identify products manufactured with the livelihood of the producers in mind. There are also websites such as www.ethical.org.au that provide a guide to ethical shopping. Whether you are buying clothing, building materials, petrol, food, or anything at all, ask yourself what you know about the company. Ensure that you are being a responsible consumer and only supporting people or companies that are fulfilling their moral obligation to both the people and the environment where the goods are produced.

Green tip for the week: Begin an audit of your groceries- What do you know about the people that manufactured each product?

Future environmental events: The Fair Trade Fortnight (Australia and New Zealand) is being held from the 1st -16th May. This coincides with World Fair Trade Day on 8th May. For more information see www.fairtrade.com.au.