

## Environmental Frustration

Do you squirm when you watch someone toss something from the car window, or do you just think it creates jobs for highway departments? Do you remember the Exxon Valdez “accident”, or do you think this was an one-off incident? Do you believe in global warming, or do you think it’s a farce made up by those green environmental nuts?

What is the relationship between the act of tossing trash out a window, major catastrophes and global deterioration of our planet? One appears to be so minimal and inconspicuous, the next appears to be isolated while the other is considered extreme and by some fictional.

The simple act of tossing a used napkin, or can, out the window of a car, or on a walk way can’t hurt anything. Or, can it? What happens when this happens 100, 1,000, 1,000,000 times per day? What about the two, three and four weekly trash containers that we put at the end of our driveways? Today, in the United States, we generate about 4.5 pounds of garbage each day, this equates to over 200 million tons! This garbage is polluting our planet. We don’t see it in our back yards, or on our local streets, but this accumulated garbage is filling up landfills and polluting our seas. It is not disappearing! Repeat! It is not disappearing into thin air.

The Exxon Valdez oil spill occurred back in 1989. This was one of the most publicized and studied environmental tragedies in history and yes, over 15 years later, still impacts life today in the Alaskan region. On a March day, due to human error, an oil transport ship ran aground onto the Bligh Reef spilling over 10 million gallons of oil. This is equivalent to approximately 125 Olympic-size swimming pools. The affect of this tragedy has impacted over 1,000 miles of Alaskan coastline. Despite the significance of this “accident”, the Exxon Valdez incident is not even in the top 50 of oil spills, to have occurred!<sup>1</sup> To add to the astonishment of these facts, consider for a moment that oil spill such as this represent only 2.5% of oil pollution to our oceans. Do we care? What is happening?

Is Global Warming real? Stop now! This is not topic for high school or collegiate debate teams this problem is real! According to scientist, (remember scientist work on facts), the problem is real and getting worse. Help me understand how scientist from such well-respected institutes such as the Scripps Institute of Oceanography and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, along with others using data from the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration could be making this up! This problem has been recognized for many, many, many (is that enough “manys”) years now.

There are those of us who are disgusted by these very real examples of pure neglect and respect for our environment, so what can WE, the individual, do to resolve these problems? The answers are sometimes involved and frustrating, but also simple.

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<sup>1</sup> (For more detailed information - <http://www.evostc.state.ak.us/facts/qanda.html>)

Let's start by being aware! Recognize that each of us has an impact on our planet. Do not for a minute believe that you are not part of this problem. This is our garbage and our actions, or non-actions. Being aware can be as simple as separating your recyclables (cans, bottles and newspapers to start with) and disposing of through your local centers. Is that too difficult?

Oil Pollution – What will you say or do when oil washes up on your coastline? Imagine going to the beach and seeing black ooze where there was sand and rocks. I can imagine it and I never ever want it to happen. Life on our planet is directly impacted by the health of our oceans. What can we do?

We can stand committed and voice our concerns to our elected officials. After all, there are hull design technologies that can protect their contents. The next time your state hosts one of these ships stand firm in your opposition to their coming into port unless the ship is one of the ones utilizing the new hull designs.

We can support renewable energy systems. Speak with your wallets, support those companies, which are supporting and implementing solutions that deliver on the vision of a healthy world.

Global warming? First, do you believe? If your answer is yes, then write to our political leaders and express your concern. Inform them that you want the United States to take an active leadership role in establishing guidelines that will protect the earth. Did you know that there are 140 nations that have ratified the Kyoto Treaty and the U.S. is not one of them! Here is a simple task, pick up the phone or write a letter to your elected officials – if you really do care!

As an individual there are other simple steps that you can take. How about any of the following?

- Recycle, recycle, recycle
- Join and participate in one of the many action oriented groups that speak out to our local, state and national representatives,
- Make sure that the next car you buy is either a hybrid, or a vehicle which gets at least 30+ miles per gallon,
- Keep your existing car in good condition,
- When possible, walk, ride a bike, carpool, or use mass transit (you paid for that transit system),
- Plant trees and shrubs.

C'mon folks, this is NOT hard! The consequences of our individual and collective polluting and wasting actions are real. Accept this for the reality it is. Be aware and begin to take simple steps and be part of the answer.

“I am only one person”, “What we do as a family does not matter”, are you serious? OK, back to basic math. If you do something and your neighbor does something, that's more than one, now if we each get one more, that's four and so on, and so on, you get the picture. Imagine if 100, 1,000, 10,000, 100, 000 or 1,000,000 people were doing “something”, do you think it will make a difference? YES! It will! Take a small step – NOW!