

EDITORIAL

with Frances Niblock

Who stands on their convictions?

Would you want to work or do business with a company with 301 employees that has the following statistics?

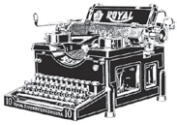
- 30 have been accused of spousal abuse
- nine have been arrested for fraud
- fourteen have been accused of writing and passing bad cheques
- ninety-five have directly or indirectly bankrupted at least two companies
- four have served penitentiary time for assault
- fifty-five cannot receive a credit card due to a poor credit rating
- twelve have been arrested on drug related charges
- four have been arrested for shoplifting
- sixteen are currently defendants in lawsuits
- and sixty-two have been arrested for drunk driving in the last year

Can you guess which organization this is? It is MPs in the Canadian Parliament – the same group that effects our way of life.

Of course, not all MPs have such nefarious credentials – but the list – first printed in the Ottawa Citizen – is sure an eye opener – as is watching our elected officials in action – yelling, booing, rudely interrupting and acting in a way that would get most five-year-olds sent to the naughty chair.

A list like this indicates that Canadians need to know more about the candidates that stand for election – how much do you know about your MP?

Looking Back



Ten Years Ago

- Halton Hills Community Support and Information received a \$38,752 Federal grant for community-based youth crime prevention initiative.
- A delay in getting necessary development permits means the \$2.2-million expansion and renovation at St. Joseph Catholic School will not likely be ready for the start of the new school year.
- Acton residents mourned the death of former teacher Ted Hansen, 83, who was the first principal at Acton's new high school when it opened in 1954.

Five Years Ago

- Former chair of the Halton board of education and current trustee Ethel Gardiner called the board “dysfunctional” and wants the Ministry of Education to step in and take control.
- Although Halton's physician recruitment initiatives have lured 35 new doctors to Halton, not one has come to Acton, which has the most acute need of new doctors.
- Town staff anger many when they remove items from graves at Fairview Cemetery without informing anyone. Now banned are beer or liquor bottles, glass jars with candles and plants with thorns.



MAYOR'S TOURNEY: Halton Hills Councillor Clark Somerville perfected his putting skills as volunteers Colin Ash and Marsha Batchelor looked on at Blue Springs Golf Course on Monday as 126 golfers hit the links at the annual Mayor's tournament to benefit Heritage Acton. – Denise Paulsen photo

Our oil addiction has always been messy

By David Suzuki
with Faisal Moola

The explosion on BP's Deepwater Horizon platform in the Gulf of Mexico and subsequent uncontrolled release of millions of litres of oil a day is a monumental disaster. But why are we surprised? Oil drilling and transportation are not like brain surgery; they involve brute technology to obtain and move crude oil, and oil is slopped around in this process every day. Over the years, numerous major spills have occurred on land, from drilling platforms at sea, and after collisions and breakups of ships.

Back in 1967, the Torrey Canyon spilled 117 million litres of crude oil off Cornwall, England. In 1976, the Argo Merchant dumped 29 million litres of fuel oil off Massachusetts. A blow-out at the offshore Ekofisk Bravo platform in 1977 released about 30 million litres into the North Sea in 1977, and the Amoco Cadiz dumped 260 million litres off France in 1978. We've seen oil spilled in dozens of other collisions, blow-outs, deliberate releases (in 1991, Iraq released up to 1.9 billion litres of crude oil into the Persian Gulf), and storms (in 2005, hurricane Katrina caused the release of more than 25 million litres). Closer to home, in 1970, the Arrow spilled almost 10 million litres into Chedabucto Bay in Nova Scotia, and in 1988, the Odyssey dumped 159 million litres off St. John's, Newfoundland. And in 1989, the Exxon Valdez spilled over 40 million litres into the pris-

tine waters of Prince William Sound off the Alaska coast.

Today, tens of thousands of wells operate on land and at sea, massive supertankers move huge quantities across oceans, and pipelines and trucks transport oil over land. Stuff happens: earthquakes, accidents, storms, tides, icebergs, and of course, human error.

What can we learn from the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico? First, there's no such thing as a “fool-proof” technology because, as the computer Hal in the movie 2001: A Space Odyssey knew, the biggest threat to a mission is a fallible, imperfect human being. We should also learn that relying so heavily on non-renewable fossil fuels for most of our energy needs carries numerous risks, from devastating spills to catastrophic climate change.

In 1979, I hosted a program called Tankerbomb that warned of the hazards of supertanker traffic from Alaska past the treacherous B.C. coast. A decade later, the Exxon Valdez spill confirmed that warning. More recently, a ferry, the Queen of the North, ran into Gil Island on B.C.'s North Coast. Human beings are fallible, and in B.C., our coast is marked by numerous rocks and reefs. That's why coastal First Nations are unanimous in their opposition to the proposed Enbridge pipeline to transport oil from the Alberta tar sands to the West Coast where it would be loaded onto ships. The possibility of a tanker accident is too great a risk to their communities and fishing grounds.

Supertankers are huge, up to 300 metres in length, and can haul enough energy to fuel a small city. It takes three kilometres and 14 minutes for such a vessel going at full speed to stop and reverse direction. Although most newer supertankers are equipped with double hulls to reduce the threat of a spill in the event of a collision, many ships still sport single hulls.

Corporations don't focus enough on prevention nor do they consider victims of their accidents a high priority. The Exxon Valdez spill led to litigation by several citizens' groups, including fishers, tour guides, and First Nations. The courts awarded them money, but the oil company appealed numerous decisions. During almost two decades of stalling, Exxon continued to earn record profits.

Supertanker accidents and the Gulf spill reveal how little attention is paid to prevention. As oil continues to gush from the deep-sea well in the Gulf, BP's response has been pathetic. We have to plan in exquisite detail for any exigency, not play fast and loose with our claims of having everything under control. And we really must start shifting from fossil fuels to cleaner renewable energy sources. We can all do our part as well by conserving energy and by reducing our reliance on cars. And here in Canada, we can let our leaders know that we're counting on them to make sure our oceans and coastlines are protected from catastrophes like the one in the Gulf of Mexico.



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