

Sound Truth and Corporate Myths The Legacy of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill

by Riki Ott, PhD

Overview

In this meticulously researched exposé of oil as a health hazard, Riki Ott, PhD, reveals the profound legacy of the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, uncovering the startling truth that oil is much more toxic to humans and wildlife than previously thought. In fact, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), a fraction of crude oil, may well be the new DDT of the 21st century. *Sound Truth and Corporate Myths* traces fifteen years of lingering harm to humans and wildlife following the spill, revealing how corporate greed, government short-sightedness, and manipulation of the media have kept the public from learning the deadly nature of PAHs. Ott provides relevant information to public health, the environment, and our energy future, as well as practical recommendations for people and policymakers to reduce consumption of fossil fuels and help shift society to a clean energy future.

Section Outline

Introduction

The author, an eyewitness to the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in Prince William Sound, Alaska, exposes the disaster's long-term legacy of sick people and ailing wildlife—problems caused by the oil and also, ironically, by Exxon's cleanup efforts. The pressurized hot water wash used to clean the beaches killed sealife and likely harmed

cleanup workers, who were also affected by the chemicals used in the cleanup. Ott states her commitment to educate people about oil's toxic legacy.

Part 1: Sick Workers

- Section One – Chapters 1-3: Examines how the majority of beach cleanup workers likely became sick due to key failings of Exxon's worker safety program.
- Section Two – Chapters 4-7: Details case studies of individual workers in various cleanup jobs such as skiff operation, decontamination, beach washing, and chemical spraying.
- Section Three – Chapters 8 and 9: Reveals systemic failures to protect sick workers within government agencies as well as the medical and legal systems.
- Section Four – Chapter 10: Provides an overview of the medical, legal, and political obstacles posed to cleanup workers and the general public by the petrochemical problem.

Part 2: Sound Truth

- Section One – Chapter 11: Reviews pre-spill studies on oil toxicity to marine life in Prince William Sound based on an outdated 1970s-era scientific understanding.
- Section Two – Chapters 12-16: Examines the public-trust (government-funded) studies to assess damage to habitat and wildlife from the spill, using the 1970s science, and deconstructs Exxon's studies to show how improper use of statistics masked the extent of harm from the spill.
- Section Three – Chapters 17-21: Reveals the growing concern among the public-trust scientists that 1970s science was inadequate to explain the observed long-term harm to sealife from the spill, and examines the resulting pioneering "ecosystem studies" that led to a new understanding of oil's toxic effects to sealife.

- Section Four – Chapter 22: Reports on the recovery status of wildlife and habitat fifteen years after the spill, framed by the emerging understanding that oil causes both short-term *and* long-term harm.

Part 3: The Legacy and Beyond

- Chapter 23 – Integrates the legacy of the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill with current concerns of public health, environmental health, and our energy future.
- Chapter 24 – Examines sources of PAHs into the environment, and presents nine recommendations for industry, government, and individuals to reduce oil pollution and oil use.

Epilogue

- Provides inspiration for readers to take action based on personal reflections from the author.