

Environment



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The recent history of eroding our natural resources and devastating our environment has led us to the edge of a national disaster. Our unchecked development has scarred the landscape leaving little more than wreckage in its wake. The air we breathe is being poisoned as we ease standards of pollution in a misguided attempt to jump-start the economy. Our water supply, food supply, and rivers are all falling victim to our overzealous need for speed and greed. Even the farthest points on the planet are not immune. Business has lobbied to roll back the current environmental laws and it is time for business to take responsibility and be held financially liable for the destruction of an environment that belongs to everyone.

The air, the water, and the health of the planet are the right of all men, and the purpose of government is precisely to protect these human rights. Yet, the current administration's policy has been called a, " Christmas tree for oil interests, a license for industry profiteering, or a wide-ranging assault on the environment" (Cohen). Current policy gives business no incentive to save energy or seek alternate sources. Man did not inherit the planet, mankind did and free enterprise does not mean the freedom to destroy or deplete these scarce and vital resources to cater to a business's bottom line.

The clearest and most effective way to coerce a business into taking responsibility for the environment is to make it financially beneficial. Public awareness, boycotts, and political activism can be effective. During a four day period of protests at the 1999 WTO meeting, businesses lacking a favorable social responsibility reputation had declined by 2.36%, while those having a positive reputation were down by less than half that amount (Schmietz & Epstein, 2004). Clearly, a good reputation, even in the absence of direct linkage to specific areas, is an overwhelming value to the company

and shareholders when it is clearly identified by the public as desirable. Environmental law needs to be enforced and companies held accountable for their actions. Fines need to be of a sufficient magnitude to render it more valuable to the company to obey the law than violate it. According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the government watchdog, penalties may " not be large enough to offset the economic benefits on noncompliance and are not documented consistently" (" Further Improvements Needed"). The typical slap on the wrist is no longer acceptable and we need leaders with the courage to confront what may be their largest political contributors. Business and industry have a major impact on our environment and they have a responsibility to the rest of the human race to guard against its wanton destruction. Consumers can put economic pressure on companies known to violate reasonable environmental standards. However, the greatest pressure will come from strict enforcement of adequate legislation. The penalties for destroying the environment must exceed the financial gain of breaking the law. Business will only step up to the plate when it becomes in their own financial self interest to do so.

Works Cited

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