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## Voice of the people

# Exxon boss should quit over oil spill

CHICAGO—Concern for the environment is a bipartisan issue that cuts across income, racial, religious and other lines. We all sense that unless something is done differently, we are in danger of further ruining this fragile planet.

In this country, it is not overpopulation that is the danger, but how we manage ourselves, our technology and our resources. The environment in a capitalist country is largely in the hands of private citizens and private business. We depend upon them to act responsibly toward the Earth, air, water, wildlife and other human beings.

Various levels of government have passed many laws to help provide guidelines and limits on the behavior and activities of private industry and individuals. However, it is clear that no group of lawmakers can ever devise a system of laws to cover all of the possible ways business and individuals can harm the environment. We create more bureaucracy, forms to fill out and jobs for lawyers than solutions to environmental problems.

The Exxon Valdez oil spill is a national and world calamity. Many Americans who have never been near Alaska are sick as they contemplate the horrible situation. The damage to wildlife is incalculable and Exxon's role in the tragedy is totally inexcusable.

It is very clear who is responsible when a drunken sea captain rams a ship aground and causes massive environmental damage. The chief executive officer of a giant corporation like Exxon earns his seven-digit paycheck by being an expert in management. His number one responsibility is organizing a chain of command and staffing it with qualified executives who know what is going on at the working level. He picked the people and approved the organization.

Who is more at fault here—an alcoholic merchant captain hanging on to his livelihood, or the chief executive who assigned him to take responsibility for the Exxon Valdez and the movement of millions of gallons of crude oil over thousands of miles?

**Any student of management knows the answer**

to that one. Size of the company is no excuse; if the company is too big to manage properly, it should be broken into smaller pieces and staffed by hands-on managers. We know that giant companies are often notorious for top managers staying behind their desks and not getting out on the front lines and listening to their people.

It is instructive to note that in the case of a Japanese air crash or train wreck, the CEO is honor-bound to accept personal responsibility and resign. Many would argue that the Valdez disaster is far worse for our planet than a train or plane crash, even though human lives are not taken.

What would be accomplished by the Exxon board asking for Chairman Lawrence Rawl to resign? First, the board would send a strong signal to future Exxon CEOs and to all Exxon managers around the world that they have a personal responsibility to protect the world's environment, whether it's an Exxon chemical plant, pipeline, oil field or refinery, and whether it's a lake, ocean, aquifer, human life or the atmosphere at stake.

Second, the board would send a strong signal to other corporations that boards and managements must take their environmental responsibilities seriously, and their jobs are at risk if they don't. Believe me, CEOs of all companies with chemical plants, pipelines, refineries and other high-risk processes and transportation requirements will start asking more questions about environmental risks and making more visits to the front lines.

American CEOs are the first to complain about government regulation. The primary alternative and way to pre-empt regulation is self-policing. Self-policing by private industry means Chairman Rawl must go. Most CEOs understand that "the buck stops here." If Chairman Rawl does not resign voluntarily, the board should move quickly to ask for his resignation and help prevent the environmental disasters of the future.

**Gary MacDougal**

Former chairman and chief executive officer  
Mark Controls Corp.