

# Friends of the Earth's complaint about a Shell advert submitted to the Advertising Standards Authority

## Where seen:

1. Sunday Times Magazine pp30-31.
2. Independent Magazine p42. The advert is also being used in newspapers and magazines elsewhere in Europe and simultaneous complaints are being filed in other European countries.

## When seen:

1. 22 April 2007
2. 21 April 2007

## Complaint:

Our complaint is in four areas and it is made under sections 3 Substantiation, 7 Truthfulness and 49 Environmental Claims of the code. References for all data are available, but not included due to your space restrictions of 5000 characters. We ask the ASA to order Shell to withdraw the advert and publish rectifications of the same size as the original on its website and wherever the advert has been published, stating that the advert was misleading and incorrect.

### 1. The imagery of the advert

The advert shows a classic refinery outline but with the chimneys producing flowers not smoke, giving the message that Shell's refineries are clean with a positive environmental impact. This is misleading. In reality, Shell's refineries in Nigeria, Durban, Texas, Manila and elsewhere emit dirty smoke containing a cocktail of chemicals that can include benzene, carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulphide, lead, nitrogen dioxide and oxide, particulate matter, pentane, propane, sulphur dioxide and many other toxins. These chemicals are known to cause a wide range of health problems including respiratory diseases, polyneuropathy, developmental and reproductive problems and many forms of cancer. Instances of these diseases are often higher in the communities living next to the refineries.

### 2. Headline message: "don't throw anything away there is no away"

This statement may be true, but the implication that Shell carries out its operations in line with this statement is absolutely false and misleading.

i) Gas, a by-product of oil exploration, is a useful fuel in its own right. Yet in many places Shell throws this gas away by flaring (ie burning) it. Eg Shell continues to constantly flare gas in Nigeria, despite it being illegal to do so and Shell has been ordered by the Nigerian High Court to stop. This flaring is a massive waste of energy resources in a country with severe energy shortages.

ii) Oil and fuel spills occur often at Shell refineries, pipelines and oil depots, wasting the fuel and leaving long term pollution. Eg in Nigeria where millions of barrels of Shell's oil have been spilt, clean up is often non-existent or superficial. Shell, being the biggest oil company in Nigeria, is responsible for a substantial part. Clean up is often non-existent or superficial: during a visit to the Niger Delta in 2005, Friends of the Earth encountered a Shell contractor involved in an oil "clean up" operation which involved little more than turning the land.

In Curacao Shell operated a refinery for 70 years, closing it in 1982. Shell refuses to clean up its legacy of waste which contaminates the reef and the toxic lakes, filled with chemical waste, including "Asphalt lake", filled with 800,000 cubic metres of asphalt and tar.

### **3. Specific claim: "We use our waste CO2 to grow flowers"**

This implies Shell uses all of its waste CO2 to grow flowers. Shell produced 100 million tonnes of CO2 in 2005 from its direct emissions. Indirectly, via the consumption of the oil and gas it produces, Shell is responsible for many times more CO2 emissions. In Shell's literature we have been able to find one case where Shell recycles CO2 into growing plants – at the Pernis refinery in the Netherlands CO2 is piped to greenhouses to aid plant growth, replacing gas heaters traditionally used. According to Shell this saves 325,000 tonnes of CO2 each year - 0.325 per cent of Shell's total direct emissions. Shell is making very exaggerated and therefore very misleading claims.

### **4. Specific claim: "we use ... our waste sulphur to make super strong concrete"**

i) We have not been able to find any references to Shell using sulphur to make concrete and feel that this information should be easily available to the public as public claims are being made.

ii) Whilst Shell does recover and sell on much of its waste sulphur, in 2005 Shell produced 323,000 tonnes of sulphur. The advert implies Shell uses all of its waste sulphur to make concrete. This is incorrect and therefore misleading. Shell's emission of sulphur into the atmosphere causes severe pollution. For example:

a) In Durban Shell emits 7,300 tonnes of sulphur dioxide a year. It could recover and reuse much of this - a similar refinery using more up to date technology in Denmark emits six times less. Shell's emission of sulphur is causing health problems for its neighbours. Sulphur dioxide is a severe respiratory irritant which can trigger asthma attacks. There is significant incidence of chronic asthma amongst Durban residents, especially children.

b) Gas flaring is a major source of Shell's sulphur emissions. In Nigeria Shell illegally flares constantly. Sulphur dioxide combines with atmospheric moisture to form sulphuric acid – a primary cause of acid rain. Acid rain has caused devastation in the Niger Delta, acidifying lakes and streams, damaging and killing vegetation and crops and corroding roofs.

c) Shell's CEO has recently spoken of projects such as the Athabasca Oil Sands Project in Canada as being "the foundations for Shell in the first half of the 21st century." Production of synthetic crude oil from oil sands produces almost 2.5 times the sulphur emissions than conventional oil production.