



MARK CARWARDINE WILD THOUGHTS

What really upsets me about the Gulf oil spill (apart from the 5 million barrels of crude oil that spilled into the sea, of course, and President Obama's sudden proclamation that "the vast majority of the spilled oil has been dispersed or removed", as if that's the end of the matter) is the atrocious double standards shown by multinational oil companies.

While BP smugly agrees to pay for the environmental clean-up and resulting economic losses in the Gulf of Mexico, oil companies elsewhere in the world are causing just as much harm – even more harm in some cases – and yet they're getting away scot-free or shelling out minuscule compensation payments.

The Niger Delta, a major oil-producing region in Nigeria, is just one of a number of shocking examples. The region's rivers, marshes, forests, farmlands and drinking water are contaminated with considerably more oil every year than was discharged in the entire Gulf oil spill.

Millions of local inhabitants have been drinking polluted water, eating contaminated fish, farming on spoiled land and breathing in air that stinks of oil and gas for decades.

It must be unbelievably galling for them to watch those frantic efforts to stop the spill in US waters, and hear about the huge compensation payments being promised, when the rest of the world doesn't seem to care about the arrogance of oil companies operating in the developing world as if they are above the law.

Part of the blame has to lie with the Nigerian government and governments in other afflicted countries, though admittedly they don't have as much political clout as the United States. But some blame should also lie with countries that buy the oil – to add insult to injury, while most Americans couldn't point to Nigeria on a map, they get 40 per cent of all their crude oil imports from the Niger Delta.

In the UK, we need to take some responsibility, too, for those contemptible British companies recklessly cause so much damage throughout the world.



The Niger Delta: more degraded by oil pollution than the Gulf of Mexico.

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Mark Carwardine will be presenting a *Last Chance to See* special, with Stephen Fry, about the Gulf oil spill later this year on BBC2.