

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Researchers find energy companies vary widely on policies seeking input and informing those affected by major developments

Authors will present their ‘Community Consent Index’ at UH Law Center Feb. 12

Feb. 5, 2013 – What do major energy companies say publicly about their policies concerning local input and potential impact on communities when oil, natural gas and mining projects are in the planning stages?

Researchers from Oxfam America, part of an international confederation of 17 organizations working in approximately 90 countries to find solutions to poverty, related injustice and other problems, surveyed the public statements of 28 companies to detail their positions on community rights and consent.

Authors of the study, Emily Greenspan and Marianne Voss, will present their findings, compiled in a Community Consent Index, on Feb. 12 at the University of Houston Law Center. Their presentation is sponsored by the Environment, Energy and Natural Resources Center at the University of Houston Law Center and the UH Association of International Petroleum Negotiators Student Club.

“Increasingly, around the world local communities are demanding a meaningful voice in determining whether and under what conditions oil, natural gas and mining projects take place,” the authors noted in summarizing their report.

Tracy Hester, visiting associate professor at the University of Houston Law Center and director of its Environment, Energy and Natural Resource Center, stressed the importance of keeping the community fully informed and involved in development plans.

“Local community consent (and opposition) has emerged as one of the key steps that can affect the success or failure of large projects,” Hester said. “Proactive policies can help protect the health and rights of local communities and reduce the risk of strife or conflict.”

Oxfam's summary, focusing on 2010 through 2012, “concludes that these policies vary in the degree that they promote community rights and the transparency that the corporations provide to outside observers,” he said.

“The report also argues that corporations should aggressively incorporate policies that would seek the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples and local communities where they plan to produce oil, gas and minerals” Hester added. “These policies would minimize the risk that large-scale projects would be jeopardized by community opposition and the danger that frustrated expectations might spark populist responses.

“As the world's energy capital, Houston is home to many of the large energy and mining corporations discussed in the report. Their local community consent policies will play a direct role in their plans for exploration and production, and bad planning on them can derail even their largest projects if the local population strongly objects to them,” he said.

The presentation is free and open to the public on Tuesday, Feb. 12, from 5 to 6 p.m. in the Hendricks Heritage Room on the 2d floor of Teaching Unit II in the Law Center. Discussion by audience members is welcome. A reception will follow.

The report is available on Oxfam America’s website and can be downloaded at oxfamamerica.org/publications/community-consent-index/.

Who: Emily Greenspan and Marianne Voss of Oxfam America

What: “Community Consent Index”

When: Tuesday, Feb. 12, 5 - 6 p.m.

Where: University of Houston Law Center, Hendricks Heritage Room, 2nd floor, Teaching Unit II

For more information:

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About the University of Houston Law Center

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