

Donovan Campaign Against Shell

CONTEXT

Alfred Donovan and his son John, long-time critics of Shell because of a dispute over a marketing promotion in the UK many years ago, run a website <http://royaldutchshellplc.com> critical of the Shell Group. They also are a main driver of a Wikipedia site 'Controversies surrounding Royal Dutch Shell'. In the past they have promoted allegations from eg Shell over North Sea safety and from over alleged nuclear activity at a former Shell terminal at Earley outside Reading in the UK, and a number of Shell Malaysia related issues. An article about them in the 19 July 2009 *Sunday Times* was headlined 'Two men and a website mount vendetta against an oil giant'. Recent posts on their "Shell Blog" have discussed Transition 2009 and some of the Shell people involved. John Donovan has recently been publishing material received following a second Subject Access Request to Shell under the UK Data Protection Act for personal information relating to him, and has been distributing leaflets outside Shell Centre.

KEY MESSAGES

- We are familiar with the activities of Messrs Alfred and John Donovan, who are longstanding critics of Shell. We are disappointed that they continue to seek to use any recent Shell developments to try and draw attention to their longstanding but unjustified grievances.
- Our general policy is not to comment on specific issues raised by the Donovans. Although we disagree fundamentally with the factual basis and interpretation of much of the information on which they base their various allegations, our past attempts to have a constructive debate have been unproductive.

SUPPORTING FACTS

- Shell took pains to ensure that Mr Donovan's claims were fully investigated and settled many years ago. Notwithstanding the impression he likes to give, he failed in the only case of his against Shell that went to court. It is therefore disappointing that the Donovans continue their long-running and acrimonious campaign against Shell on a wide range of subjects.
- Our position, as conveyed to the RDSplc website, is: "The lack of a rebuttal from, or comment by, Shell does not in any way constitute an acceptance on Shell's part of the accuracy of any of the points made by you whether now or in the future, and whether on this or on any other matter, and we continue to reserve our position accordingly in respect of those matters."

BRIDGING

If asked whether the Sunday Times' statement, that "When a new [Shell] executive took over marketing, he used several of their [the Donovans'] schemes but refused to pay for them", is true:

- Absolutely not. Shell took pains to ensure that Mr Donovan's claims - about a marketing promotion in the UK many years ago - were fully investigated and properly dealt with. The fact is that Mr Donovan failed in the only case of his against Shell that went to court. The Judge not only completely exonerated the character of the Shell executive in question, but also was highly critical of Mr Donovan's actions throughout the process of litigation.

If asked about the alleged nuclear reactor at Earley:

- We have given a categorical written assurance that Shell has never been involved in "atomic" or "nuclear" research at Earley or elsewhere in the UK, and that no nuclear bunker is buried under the former Shell terminal. According to the European Commission, the data show radioactivity levels substantially below those considered harmful to human health. Any radioactivity found on the site has nothing to do with Shell's activities.

Did you avoid disclosing certain information in response to the Donovans' Data Protection Act requests?

- We complied fully with the Data Protection Act request while making legitimate use of the ability under the Act to withhold information in certain limited circumstances, for example where it is legally privileged or to protect the identities of third parties. We did the same for the previous request.

Why do you not sue the Donovans for libel?

- The experience of corporate defamation plaintiffs is that, even when successful, such cases draw far more attention to the untrue allegations that they would receive without the case having been brought. However, we do not exclude this as a possibility.

Why do you not edit the Wikipedia site 'Controversies surrounding Royal Dutch Shell'?

- Other companies have been strongly criticised for editing entries about themselves, and doing so would only serve to draw attention to the site. We prefer to focus on making our own Shell sites as good as possible.

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