

Complaint:

Misleading and incorrect advertisements of ExxonMobil in the Brussels Airport

Friends of the Earth Europe¹ (FoEE) is filing a complaint to the Ministry for Economic Affairs against ExxonMobil company for its advertisements claiming:

- (1) **“We’re working to reduce emissions, for cars, trucks, buses... and 6.5 billion people.”**
- (2) **“Our destination? A world with more energy supplies and fewer greenhouse gas emissions.”**

These two advertisements are displayed in the Brussels Airport **jetways** (corridors connecting terminal and planes, used for boarding and disembarking from planes). Pictures of the advertisements can be seen at:

<http://www.foeeurope.org/corporates/news/misleadingads.html>

We believe that the advertisements violate articles 1, 3, 4, 9 and 14 of the “Principes de base” of the “Code de la publicité écologique” of the Ministry of Economic Affairs in the following ways:

- exploiting the lack of public knowledge in the field of environment (Article 1);
- directly or indirectly misleading the public about ExxonMobil’s services and its contribution to environmental protection (Articles 3, 4);
- using scientific data that can not be justified by evidence (contradicting even ExxonMobil’s own 2006 Corporate Citizenship Report) (Articles 9, 14);

In its violations of the Code, ExxonMobil also contravenes Article 23 of the Loi du 14 juillet 1991. This same law empowers the Ministry to initiate proceedings to order the cessation of unlawful advertisements. It is in this capacity that we demand action from the Ministry.

We ask the Ministry to evaluate these advertisements and take appropriate action to order ExxonMobil to stop and remove the advertisements and publish - at the expense of ExxonMobil - corrections stating that the advertisements are misleading and incorrect. These corrections should be published on ExxonMobil’s website, in the media as well as displayed in places (jetways) that have featured the advert. They should have the same size, scope and significance as the original (disputed) advertisements.

Friends of the Earth Europe
Rue Blanche 15
B - 1050 Brussels
Tel: 02 542 0180

Contact Person: Darek Urbaniak
Tel.: 02 401 4804
Fax: 02 537 5596
E-mail: darek.urbaniak@foeeurope.org

¹ Friends of the Earth Europe campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world’s largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International.

The Complaint

The two advertisements of ExxonMobil, a multinational oil and gas company, displayed in the Brussels Airport attempt to bolster the company image as an environmentally friendly, responsible company.

According to the information provided to the public in these advertisements, ExxonMobil is working to reduce emissions from cars, trucks and buses for the benefit of 6.5 billion people. Furthermore, ExxonMobil asserts that it is taking steps to provide more energy supplies while curbing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

Investigation of the ExxonMobil Corporate Citizenship Report 2006 [1] carried out by Friends of the Earth Europe revealed that the claims and statements made by ExxonMobil in these advertisements are false, misleading and manipulate factual company data. They create the image that ExxonMobil is reducing its greenhouse gas emissions while in reality both its CO₂ emissions and the amount of flared hydrocarbon have increased considerably (almost 6,5% and over 45% respectively) over the last 4 years.

Advertisements

“We’re working to reduce emissions, for cars, trucks, buses... and 6.5 billion people.”

“Our destination? A world with more energy supplies and fewer greenhouse gas emissions.”

The headlines of these advertisements imply that ExxonMobil is **“working to reduce emissions...”** and that its goal is **“A world with more energy supplies and fewer greenhouse gas emissions.”**

The ExxonMobil 2006 Corporate Citizenship Report

The headlines of these advertisements clearly indicate that ExxonMobil is working to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and emissions as a whole. This is a false and misleading statement as ExxonMobil’s own, yearly Corporate Citizenship Report for 2006 shows that the company’s greenhouse gas emissions have been rising since 2003. This clearly violates Articles 9 and 14 of the Code.

In relation to CO₂, the company’s report shows the following data:

- › 2003 - 136.8 million metric tons greenhouse gas emissions
- › 2004 - 138.5 million metric tons greenhouse gas emissions
- › 2005 - 138 million metric tons greenhouse gas emissions
- › 2006 - 145.5 million metric tons greenhouse gas emissions

In 2006, the company’s CO₂ emissions were higher by 7.5 million metric tons as compared with 2005. Though the emissions slightly decreased in 2005 the overall trend is an increase of almost 6,5% over the last 4 years rather than a decrease of emissions as the company claims. [2]

In addition, as the same ExxonMobile Corporate Citizenship Report for 2006 indicates the Hydrocarbon flaring (the burning of natural gas that is produced along with oil during oil production - a major component and contributor to greenhouse gas emissions) has also been continuously rising since 2003.

In relation to hydrocarbon flaring, the report shows the following data:

- 2003 - 612 million cubic feet per day
- 2004 - 746 million cubic feet per day
- 2005 - 819 million cubic feet per day
- 2006 - 891 million cubic feet per day

In 2006, ExxonMobil flared an additional 72 million cubic feet per day as compared with 2005. The overall trend is an increase of over 45% over the last 4 years. [2]

As indicated above, ExxonMobil's reported levels of greenhouse gas emissions in its Corporate Citizenship Report for 2006 show a significant increase (with more than 6% for CO2 and more than 45% for hydrocarbon flaring) rather than a decrease since 2003.

Therefore it is false and misleading to advertise that the company is already taking steps to reduce its emissions when even the company's own record contradicts this claim, showing that its emissions have been increasing.

References:

[1] ExxonMobil Corporate Citizenship Report 2006:
<http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/Citizenship/citizenship.asp>

ExxonMobil Corporate Citizenship Report 2003-2005:
<http://www.exxonmobil.com/corporate/citizenship/archive.asp>

[2] ExxonMobil Corporate Citizenship Report 2006, p. 5