

# The Case against Texaco

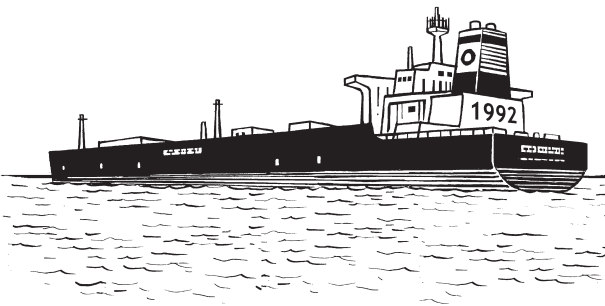
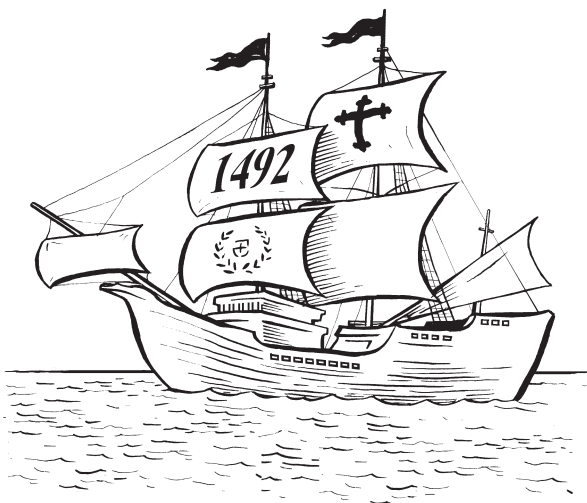
*Jeff Conant and Pam Fadem*

When Texaco came to drill for oil in Ecuador, the Cofan people who lived there had no idea the U.S. oil company would destroy their lives. For over 20 years the company dumped millions of liters of oil and toxic waste water into the environment.

Rivers that had supported the Cofan for generations became useless as sources of food. People spent many hours each day searching for drinkable water and hunting for animals. Many people fled the area due to the destruction. The Cofan leaders say that Texaco destroyed their traditional way of life and caused illness for thousands of people. The Cofan population shrunk from 15,000 people to only about 500.

The victims of Texaco's contamination formed the Front for the Defense of the Amazon. They organized medical care for those suffering from serious illnesses. They helped to organize studies of the health effects of Texaco's oil operations. They talked to environmental activists from the capital city of Quito and to lawyers in the United States. Together they came up with a plan. The leaders and activists traveled by foot, canoe, and plane to New York City to file a billion dollar lawsuit against Texaco.

Texaco tried to have the case dismissed. The company claimed the case should be tried in an Ecuadoran court because the pollution happened



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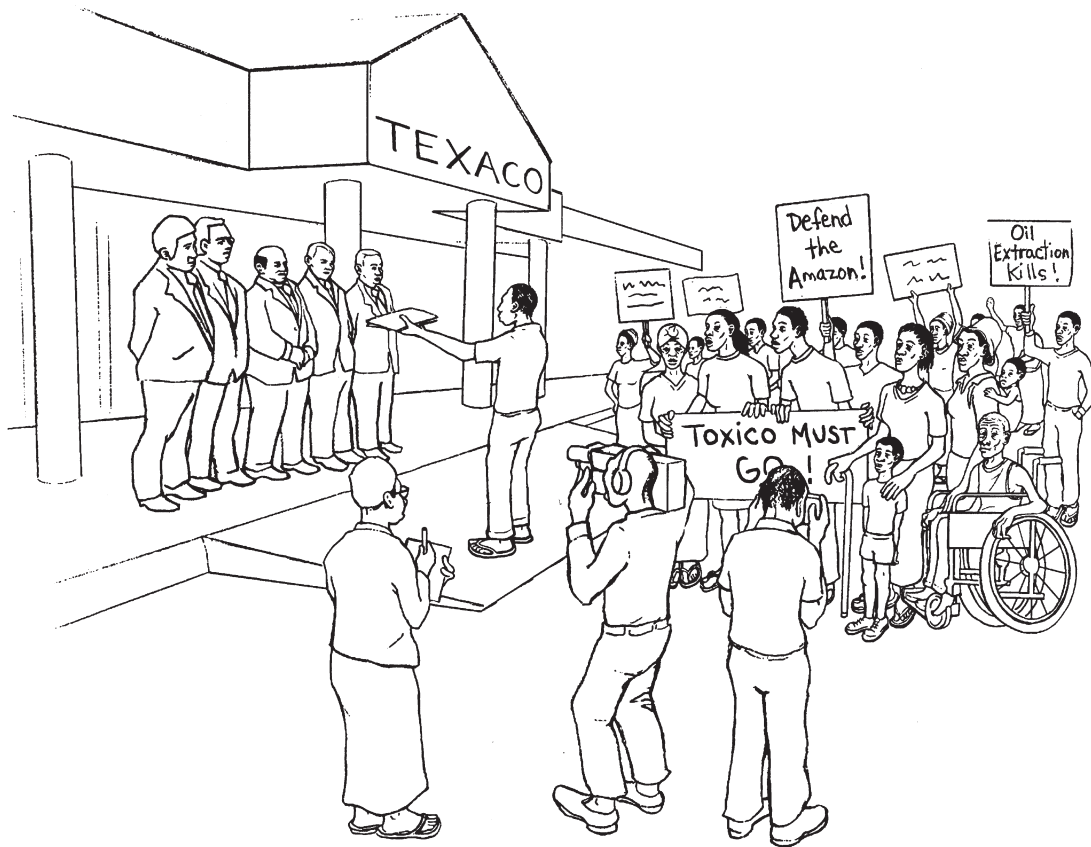
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in that country. The activists worried that it would be hard to get justice in Ecuador. They explained to the judge that the decisions to pollute the Amazon had been made in the United States. The judge agreed to listen to them. This was the first time an international case had been accepted in an American court! The Cofan leaders were overjoyed.

For 10 years Texaco fought to dismiss the case. A new judge decided that the case should be tried in Ecuador, but if a just outcome was not given,

the case could be retried in New York. The lawsuit is still not over. The people continue to suffer health problems as oil is pumped out of the rainforest. Their persistence in seeking justice from the Texaco has taught many people about the damage done by oil, and has forced Texaco and other oil companies to use safer methods of drilling for oil.

Article and images excerpted from *A Community Guide to Environmental Health* by Jeff Conant and Pam Fadem, Hesperian Foundation, <[www.hesperian.org](http://www.hesperian.org)>. Reprinted with permission.



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