

Science, objectivity, and political responsibility in the litigation of two oil spills

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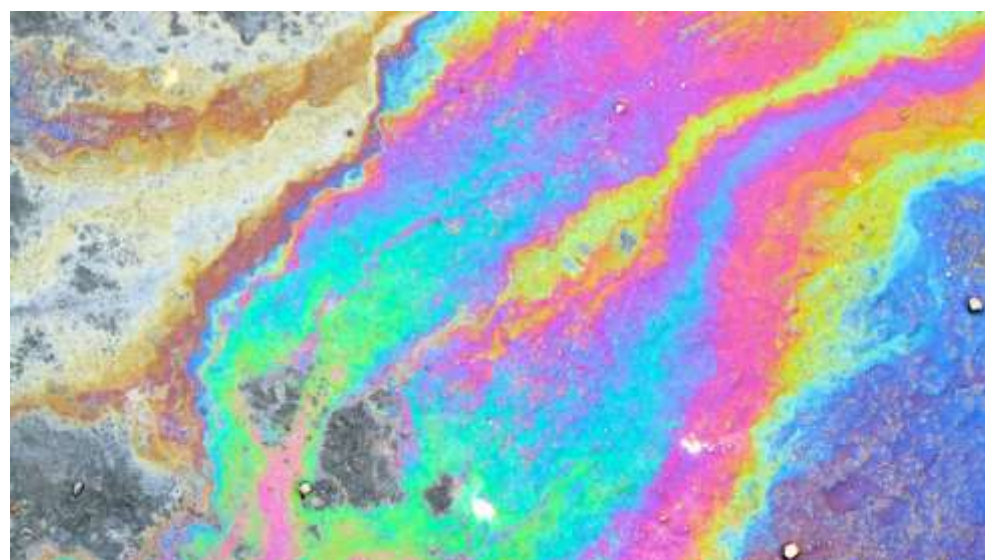
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2:00 – 4:00 pm

Weston Theatre, JG Crawford Building

This presentation examines the role of scientific experts and expertise in legal proceedings. It compares the decisions made by two scientists contributing to litigation concerning the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska in 1989 and petroleum contamination in the Ecuadorian Amazon by ChevronTexaco from the mid-1960s through the early 1990s. In the first example, a prominent environmental sociologist was asked to conduct research intended to reduce the punitive damages award against the oil company. In the second case, a geochemist with expertise on groundwater pollution was implicated in federal racketeering and corruption charges filed against the lawyer representing the plaintiffs in the case. The presentation draws on court transcripts and 'life writing' associated with the two contrasting examples to ask questions about science, objectivity, and political responsibility.



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