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Richard Fuller

Topic: life-threatening pollution and the 2011 Green Star Award in recognition of the Blacksmith Institute's response to environmental emergencies

Bringing together his experience as an engineer, entrepreneur, and environmentalist, Richard Fuller established the nonprofit Blacksmith Institute in 1982 to address a crucial gap - the lack of support I...

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Number of questions: [5]

Posted on 15/06/2011 14:07:16

Mr. Fuller,
How does your organization end up adopting a specific project? Do you get requests from individual government entities, are worldwide NGOs alerting you to polluted areas, or do you just connect up with local individuals who have requested that an assessment of their situation be made?

(And I have to throw this in here, what kind of qualifications would you say make up an ideal member of your organization?) Thanks! -Steve

Stephen Barr (from United States of America)

Hi Stephen,

Thank you for the questions. For several years now, Blacksmith Institute has been building a global inventory of polluted sites. We typically identify polluted sites through one of three avenues: through our broad network of local environmental investigators and partner organizations; through public nominations via our website (www.blacksmithinstitute.org); and increasingly, through information sharing agreements with national governments. Once sites are identified, we conduct an on-site rapid environmental assessment. The data that we collect on these sites allows us to give each site a relative health risk score. We use this score to prioritize sites for cleanup projects. We currently have identified over 2100 sites where toxic pollution exceed health standards, and hundreds of sites that should be prioritized for immediate cleanup.

One way that Blacksmith ends up taking on cleanup projects is when we can effectively match a priority site with a funding opportunity. For example, if we learn that a donor organization wants to fund mercury remediation in South America, we can scour our inventory for priority mercury sites in the region and put together a compelling proposal that shows why remediation at one site is particularly appropriate.

Blacksmith also works closely with governments and provides both technical assistance for government-run cleanup projects and strategic planning workshops to help create national strategies and programs to deal with legacy toxic pollution.

People working with Blacksmith generally fall into one of three categories: "gray-haired" experts who volunteer to serve on our Technical Advisory Board and help design remediation projects; field investigators who live in low- and middle income countries and conduct environmental assessments in their home country; and headquarters staff. The headquarters staff is comprised of a typical mix of program managers, fundraisers and admin staff. When new positions open up, they are advertised on idealist.org.

Best,
Richard Fuller

Posted on 14/06/2011 15:28:34

Richard, to what extent do developed countries have an obligation to assist poor countries in their environmental cleanups? Seems to me, since all our products are made overseas, we bear some social responsibility to help."

Martina (from United States of America)

Martina:

An excellent question. Legally, our responsibility is very limited, even if there is a US company with roots in the problem, and this is rare. Most of the problems overseas are local second-tier companies, or abandoned or artisanal sites.

Nonetheless, it is western demand that has driven much of the industrialization in the developing world, and we have not been much help in managing the commensurate pollution risks. I think there is a moral case for assisting these local and national governments in dealing with these issues.

Also, there are no international conventions that deal with the vast extent of pollution related issues. Some areas, such as pesticides and transport of hazardous waste have some international teeth, but they are minimal in their effect. Besides, the big problems do not fall under these conventions.

I believe we should be helping countries to both monitor and enforce pollution standards, and clean-up legacy hotspots. Blacksmith is committed to this.

Thanks again,

Richard Fuller



Posted on 14/06/2011 14:52:35

Richard Do you practice dendroremediation at any of your cleanup sites? If so where can I get information on your practices? Pollutants and tree species are my main interest. We in Detroit are starting this process and need to know about successful applications. Barry

barry johnson (from United States of America)

Hi Barry

On our website we have examples of success stories you can find at <http://www.blacksmithinstitute.org/success-stories.html>

We have not worked with trees with respect to remediation. Our locations usually have pollution at more than 10,000 times EPA standards, and our technical advisors have not advised dendroremediation yet. But it sounds interesting!

best

Richard Fuller



Posted on 14/06/2011 06:56:49

Dear Mr. Richard,
Congratulations for your great achievements including your support to an NGO (ENVIPRO) to manage effluents from Vingunguti Abattoir in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. How do you get funds to support many cleanup projects being undertaken by your institution worldwide?

Francis Bagambilana (from Tanzania (United Republic of))

Thanks, Francis, for asking.

We find funding from a range of different sources. It is hard work to get enough funding - we are always lacking in sufficient resources to deal with the problems we see.

Funders include governments, and their bilateral development agencies, multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, private foundations like Rockefeller Bros, and individuals. We're grateful to them all for their help, and looking forward to the day when we can do more good, as more donors decide to give to the area of environmental health.

best

Richard Fuller



Posted on 14/06/2011 06:27:26

Dear Richard,

Pentadesma butyracea

I thank you for your response. Many are not aware of this species and its potential. The natural stands are in many countries in the tropical West African Region. Except in Togo and Benin, the species is more or less unknown in other countries. This is a pity as the species has much potential. In Seychelles, where it had been introduced more than a century ago, it has regenerated naturally and at present have several thousands of trees in bearing, some > 100 years old. But, not a single seed of this oil rich crop is picked up and allowed to go waste every single year. I believe the annual crop of seed will yield a vegetable fat sufficient for the entire population for one year and it is all wasted. My efforts to get the development of the fat organised has simply been refused despite an offer of a grant of US \$ 300,000. offered by FAO to the Govt. of Seychelles. This offer I believe can still be obtained for the same purpose.

I am aware of the potential and have on my own got the species established on a limited scale in Sri Lanka. The fat has been extracted successfully. We have just one tree that is 114 years old and continues to produce a large quantity of fruits every single year.

The problem I am faced with is no one is supporting me in what I am trying to do. Are you able to forward to an organisation the full information I am able to send you along with images of the species, mature and immature, specifications of the fat etc so that I would get the required assistance to move forward with my lone effort to make the potential of Pentadesma fat known to all concerned?.

With best wishes

Hemal de Silva (from Sri Lanka)

Hi Hemal:

This sounds like an amazing species indeed.

I am afraid that I don't know how to help you. My expertise is in toxins and pollution. I do not know anything about plantations or biodiversity. Might I suggest you try another expert?

Best of luck

Richard Fuller

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