

Obama official who oversaw BP oil spill hired as Apple's environmental fixer

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On Wednesday, Apple CEO Tim Cook announced that Lisa Jackson, who was the head of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) during Obama's first term, has been hired by Apple to manage the company's environmental concerns. The appointment of an outgoing Obama official to a top position at one of the world's largest and most profitable corporations is only the latest example of the incestuous relationship between the US government—the Obama administration in particular—and the most powerful of global corporate interests.

Jackson was head of the EPA during the BP oil spill of 2010, the worst environmental disaster in US history. The explosion of an offshore drilling rig, which killed 11 workers, led to hundreds of millions of gallons of oil being leaked into the Gulf of Mexico over a period of 87 days. The long-term ecological damage is incalculable, and the livelihoods of fishermen and other workers and residents of the Gulf Coast region were ruined. BP was fined a paltry \$4 billion, or about one percent of the company's revenue for the year 2012.

From the outset, the response of the US government was to allow the “cleanup” operation to proceed entirely under the aegis of BP itself, claiming that only BP had the necessary “expertise.” Jackson authorized, and even defended before the US Senate, BP's use of toxic chemicals, including Corexit, which was found to increase the toxicity of oil by 52 times, to disperse the oil. This lessened the outward appearance of the floating oil slick while further poisoning the environment and making cleanup workers ill.

The US also saw under Jackson's reign at the EPA an expansion of hydraulic fracturing or “fracking.” Energy companies like Halliburton extract oil and natural gas

from the Earth by drilling wells and injecting corrosive chemicals at high pressure into underground faults. Fracking, which now accounts for 45 percent of natural gas production and 17 percent of oil production in the US, is known to release methane gas into the atmosphere, contaminate groundwater with carcinogenic and even radioactive substances, and has even been known to induce small earthquakes in nearby communities.

Jackson, then, is among the foremost experts in enabling corporations to profit from the destruction of the environment and to oppose widespread public opposition. Upon news of Jackson's new gig at Apple, the pro-business *Forbes* magazine said “this is really about providing an interface to the environmental bureaucracy in Washington DC: nothing to do with actually changing the way that Apple operates.”

A 2011 report by Greenpeace on the topic of energy efficiency of companies engaged in “cloud computing”—wherein the resources of large groups of computers housed in remote data centers are made available to users over the Internet—gave Apple a grade of D in its categories for “Renewables and Advocacy,” “Energy Efficiency,” and “Energy Transparency,” and an F in “Infrastructure Siting.”

In response, Apple purchased what is presently the world's largest privately owned solar panel array to “offset” pollution generated from its data centers, which are powered by coal and nuclear energy.

Environmentalist groups have swallowed this PR maneuver whole. Greenpeace senior analyst Gary Cook called Jackson's hiring a “bold move” by Apple, and called Jackson, “a proven advocate with a track record of combating toxic waste and the dirty energy that causes global warming.”

Apple, the most valuable company in history by stock

price, is also one of the world's major contributors to “e-waste,” or discarded electronic devices. The company's product line is an embodiment of the principle of “planned obsolescence” in which new versions of products are released frequently, and the newest services are only supported on new devices. This encourages—sometimes forces—users to purchase new versions of products they already own and which may still work like new, discarding the latter.

Tens of millions of tons of e-waste are produced each year. When it is recycled—which was estimated in a 2009 EPA study to be the case with about 25 percent of e-waste—it is typically sent to processing centers in China, India, Nigeria and other low-wage zones, where the complex machines are separated into their component parts by hand.

The announcement of Jackson's hiring comes in the wake of a report released last week by the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which show that Apple used offshore tax shelters to avoid paying \$9 billion in taxes in 2012.

Far from an aberration, Jackson's nearly seamless move from government regulator to corporate executive is the norm in US ruling class culture, where a virtual “revolving door” joins Washington and Wall Street. It was announced yesterday that retired General David Patraeus, after resigning his post as CIA director last year, will become the chairman of KKR Global Institute, a subsidiary of hedge fund Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. The company has been party to over 160 “leveraged buyouts” that have destroyed the jobs and pensions of workers, including those of Nabisco, Sun Microsystems, and the largest leveraged buyout in history, that of Texas utility company TXU in 2007.



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