Chevron's Pizza Apology Blunder Goes Viral

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As many of you may know, a couple of weeks ago on February 11th, an explosion occurred and fire broke out [1] on Chevron Appalachia's Lanco 7H fracking well pad in Bobtown, Pennsylvania. No drilling was taking place at the time, as the wells were not yet ready for production, but it was an intense fire and took five days to get under control. Chevron officials were on the scene immediately, working with the local fire and police departments as well as Wild Well Control [2] all week long, continually monitoring the air, surrounding water and noise in the area that could pose any risk to the residents. Although the fire caused no threat to residents, one worker was injured and, unfortunately, another died in the incident.

Chevron's attempt to apologize to Bobtown for the incident only added fuel to the flames.

Chevron

February 16, 2014

Dear Neighbor,

We are sorry to have missed you. We wanted to provide you with a status update on the February 11 incident that occurred on Chevron Appalachia's Lancoe 7 H well pads in Dunkard Township and see if you had any questions or concerns that we could address.

Chevron recognizes the effect this has had on the community. We value being a responsible member of this community and will continue to strive to achieve incident-free operations. We are committed to taking action to safeguard our neighbors, our employees, our contractors and the environment.

If you have any concerns, please call our toll-free community line at 1-877-847-8408.

Thank you,

Chevron Community Outreach Team

397118 Gift Certificate

In The Amount Of Special Combo Only

One Large Pizza
One 2-Ltr Drink

For Resident

Redeemable At
Bobtown Pizza
724-839-7021
Expires May 1, 2014

From Chevron Appalachia Community Outreach

Authorized Signature

[3] On the 16th, officials from the Chevron Community Outreach Team distributed apology letters accompanied by coupons for a large free pizza and two liter bottle of soda. The outrage could be seen on Twitter and many locals were more than happy to answer calls from reporters, sharing their disgust that a billion dollar company could only spare $12 each on the 100 affected residents. Anti-frackers trolling the web also took the opportunity to throw themselves into the fray, commenting constantly on

the many hazards of fracking in general and so close to a populated area.

While the pizza approach may not have been best, considering it seems to have done as much public relations damage as good in Bobtown, it's hard to know what the right apology would be in this situation, or if there is one at all. No one wants to think of this kind of accident as "normal" but in the grand scheme of oil and gas production, these kinds of incidents do happen. The fire posed no threat to the town and its residents and there is no cause for concern about the gas burning and venting off the wells. Obviously, an apology and gratitude is owed to the families of the injured and killed - but what is owed to the otherwise unaffected residents nearby? Would a simple issued apology have sufficed? A promise to increase their focus on safety? Those attempts probably would have provoked similar scorn from anyone (within the community or from the outside) who doesn't approve of fracking or the perceived lack of care companies like Chevron show for the communities near their wells. Chevron can promise all the safety procedures in the world, but they can never guarantee that something like this is never going to happen. It's impossible to appease a person or group already predisposed to dislike what you are doing on a good day, much less when a tragic event occurs.

In this day and age, with the threat of a crisis going viral looming over the head of every company, perhaps something so tweet-able as apology pizza wasn't the best option. But what most fail to mention as they rail against fracking and Chevron is that the gift certificates were purchased from a new, local business[1] [4] - the kinds of business made possible by a large company - like Chevron - entering a rural area like this one. While it is a bit too long and winding of a path to assume that the Chevron PR department meant it this way, the symbolism of this choice should not be lost on anyone considering whether the risks of having a well in your own backyard are worth it.

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