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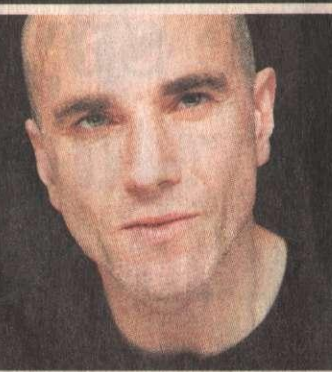
JOHANN HARI: Our new columnist on why rap music is not to blame for gun violence

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David Thomson on a reluctant superstar

COVER STORY, REVIEW



Government's green agency invests millions in companies that pollute

BY MARIE WOOLF
Chief Political Correspondent

THE GOVERNMENT'S environment watchdog body has been investing tens of millions of pounds in oil companies and firms that have been sharply criticised for their records on green issues.

The Environment Agency, which is in charge of flood protection, has invested £64m in oil firms that have been condemned for contributing to flooding by causing climate change. Last year the agency's pension fund invested £46m in BP Amoco - its largest holding - and £18m in Shell. Both firms have been fined large sums by the agency for polluting water with petrol or oil products.

The watchdog also invested £19m in Barclays Bank, which has been challenged by green groups for allegedly helping to finance logging in the Indonesian rainforest. Barclays has also been criticised for reportedly helping to arrange finance for the Yusefeli dam in Turkey, which would flood environmentally sensitive areas.

MPs and environmental campaigners called on the Environment minister Michael



£46M

BP: Fined £60,000, thought to be the highest fine in the UK for pollution from a petrol station, after leaking petrol endangered drinking water in Luton



£18M

SHELL: Fined £20,000 by the Environment Agency in 1998 for spilling 140 tons of a non-toxic soap into the Manchester Ship Canal from an oil refinery

Blunkett to outlaw the carrying of replica guns in public

BY JASON BENNETTO
Crime Correspondent

A BAN on carrying replica guns in public and a law to prevent under 18-year-olds owning air pistols are to be introduced as part of a crackdown on firearms.

News of the tightening of Britain's gun laws came as David Blunkett confirmed plans for a five-year minimum sentence for illegal possession and use of a firearm.

The Home Secretary also decided to act against imitation firearms - used by robbers in an estimated six out of ten hold-ups, and by young men as "fashion accessories" and a means of intimidation. Airguns have also been involved in a series of fatal shootings and injuries.

A new offence of carrying a replica or blank-firing gun in public without a reasonable excuse is to be created, punishable by a fine or, in extreme cases, by a jail term. The exact number of replica guns in circulation is unknown but it is thought to be in excess of 500,000. The new law will stop short of an outright ban on imitation firearms and will allow enthusiasts to keep collections. It is already a crime to

