

A new building at the University of Texas, Austin will be named the Louise and James Robert Moffett Molecular Biology Building, and one wing will be named for Mr. Moffett's Company Freeport-McMoRan. The Moffett's personally donated \$2 million for the building, while the Company gave \$1 million. Environmentalists pointed out that in 1992 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency listed New Orleans based Freeport-McMoRan, a mining company, as the nation's worst emitter of toxic chemicals. "Jim Bob Moffett and Freeport-McMorRan are an environmentalist's worst nightmare," said Bill Bunch, an environmental lawyer who has battled with the Company. Bill Collier, a spokesman for Freeport-McMoRan said the E.P.A. data referred to emissions from Louisiana fertilizer companies that have since been cleaned up. "If environmentalists can come up with the \$3 million for the building," he added, he would ask Moffett to withdraw his gift.

Should the University of Texas, Austin accept the gift from Mr. Moffett? If so, why? If not, why not?

MODERATOR'S ANSWER: The University of Texas should not accept the gift from Mr. Moffett. Every institution of higher learning, but especially a State university, has a moral responsibility to take the symbolic significance of its actions into account as a factor in making decisions. A university need not view this factor as decisive in every case, but it must give it serious consideration. Accepting Mr. Moffett's gift, and naming a building after him, would symbolically diminish good environmental citizenship. If the gift was absolutely essential for developing a key academic or research program the situation might be different. In this case, however, one must keep in mind that the University of Texas is extremely well endowed, and receives many large financial gifts.

Case from the 1995 Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl. Copyright Robert Ladenson, Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology, 1995.