

# CBS NEWS

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## **BP "Small People" Comment Angers Gulf Residents**

### **"Small People" of Gulf Coast Tired of BP's Public Relations Gaffes During the Oil Spill Crisis**

BP Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg, left, apologized for using the phrase "small people" and said he spoke "clumsily." (CBS)

(AP) The "small people" of the Gulf Coast have a humongous message for oil giant BP: They're tired of the company's big-time executives making insensitive comments.

On Wednesday, BP Chairman Carl-Henric Svanberg told reporters in Washington: "I hear comments sometimes that large oil companies are greedy companies or don't care, but that is not the case with BP. We care about the small people." He later apologized and said he spoke "clumsily."

Orange Beach, Ala., Mayor Tony Kennon laughed when he heard Svanberg's remark about "small people."

"They can call me small, miniature, they can call me anything they want. Just write the check and send it to us," he said.

But Justin Taffinder of New Orleans was not amused.

"We're not small people. We're human beings. They're no greater than us. We don't bow down to them. We don't pray to them," Taffinder said.

Svanberg is Swedish, and his comments - in English - may have been an unintentional slight. He uttered the remark to reporters following a joint press conference with President Barack Obama - who had spoke of the small business owners, the fishermen and the shrimpers affected by the spill.

Hours later, Svanberg said he was "very sorry" for speaking "clumsily."

"What I was trying to say - that BP understands how deeply this affects the lives of people who live along the Gulf and depend on it for their livelihood - will best be conveyed not by any words but by the work we do to put things right for the families and businesses who've been hurt," Svanberg said in a statement.

But coastal residents already were angry over the oil spill disaster and at BP CEO Tony Hayward's earlier comments that he "wants his life back."

Lyn Ridge, 47, ferried reporters to see oil clean up operations Wednesday in a bay at Plaquemines Parish. He just shook his head when told about the "small people" comment.

Ridge describes himself as "commercial contractor that can't find work and driving boat trying to make a living." To make matters worse, Ridge figures his house on the water in Myrtle Grove has lost half its value due to the oil spill.

"They can say he didn't mean it that way, but that's how they think of us," Ridge said. "They can't keep their foot out of their mouth," he added referring to another BP executive's desire to have his life back.

In Alabama, Terry Hanners, who owns a small construction company in Gulf Shores, said the chairman's remark revealed something about BP's frame of mind.

"These BP people I've met are good folks. I've got a good rapport with them," said Hanners, 74. "But BP does not care about us. They are so far above us. We are the nickel-and-dime folks of this world."

Kennon said he is relieved that BP agreed to put \$20 billion in an escrow fund, and joked, "They better be lucky I called off the invasion of 10,000 rednecks with their rifles headed toward England anyway."