



# US crusader Brockovich serves up food for thought as she adds glamour to organic week

**Nicola Anderson**

ERIN BROCKOVICH loves to talk - which is just as well considering she has a lot to say: "I'm just 'blah, blah, blah, blah, blah,'" the straight-talking Californian breezily explains.

It's a trait she attributes to her Irish heritage. Her mother was an O'Neill and "second or third generation" though Brockovich isn't quite sure from where. It's something she's been meaning to investigate since her mother's death last March, but she just hasn't had the time.

And it's no wonder. She is, she reckons, even more passionate now about battling environmental issues than she was as a struggling "single mom" taking on the American West Coast energy giant Pacific Gas and Electric Company for systematically polluting the groundwater supply of the town of Hinkley with the toxic chemical, Chromium 6.

Her \$333m victory for the people of Hinkley proved a story so inspiring that even Hollywood wanted to get in on the act, with an Oscar-winning movie starring Julia Roberts.

It's easy to see why Julia was cast for the role. LA slender, yet impressively

voluptuous, Brockovich stands six-foot tall in her patent cherry-red heels. She is an imposing and glamorous figure as she breezes into the penthouse suite of Dublin's Morrison Hotel, apologising for her lateness and the bags under her eyes, explaining that she is still having "schedule difficulties".

Her watch remains firmly set on Californian "Pacific Time" - she doesn't see the point of changing it since people at home will always contact her no matter what time zone she happens to be in at the time.

She has packed her husband, Eric Ellis, off to tour the Guinness Brewery while she engages in interviews, having already taken in some of the sights of herself. She was highly impressed by Dublin Castle and even did a little

shopping. "I bought a Marc Jacobs bag," she whispers guiltily.

A guest appearance on 'the Late Late Show' was on the agenda, as is a lecture today in UCD, where she will speak of the movie and going green, and muse on matters of personal choice and destiny.

Flown in by Glenisk, the Offaly organic dairy, to promote National Organic Week, this is Brockovich's first visit to Ireland.

But she is well aware of some of the more pressing

environmental issues here - including our own concerns over water pollution - and has previously spoken about community fears over the former Irish Steel plant in Cobh, Co Cork.

She has already met Environment Minister John Gormley and is confident that he is taking the concerns seriously, and says her advice for the people of Cobh is to seek the establishment of a medical monitoring programme - to help detect any health issues that may develop over time.

"Then they have to ensure that it doesn't happen in future," she adds firmly.

She believes companies responsible for pollution, in general do not have a good approach in dealing with such problems, considering they often know of the issue long before locals or even scientists.

They should come out with their hands up, inform people of the dangers and

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"be honest with them", she says.

Brockovich calculates that if this had been done in her own situation, in the first Hinkley lawsuit, it would have saved that company around five to seven million dollars.

"Man has so much technology and these companies have the funding available to stop this pollution, clean it up and change the future, but I don't see that happening - it's mind-boggling," she said.

Brockovich is now a firm believer in organic produce. "Water and soil is where our food comes from so if that's polluted, we are eating it," she said, adding that a recent US survey revealed the water supply to over 41 million American homes was contaminated.

"And it's a problem all over the world," she says.

While she is aware that some people may have concerns over the cost of organic food, she insists that she is not particularly wealthy, but does not find such a huge price difference between a "packet of cereal and a bag of organic apples".

Her lecture will take place today at UCD's Belfield campus at 1pm, with tickets at the door or available from ticketmaster.ie.



Erin Brockovich at Dublin's Morrison Hotel yesterday on her visit to Dublin to promote National Organic Week. STEVE HUMPHREYS