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REINVENTED HISTORY LOOKS LIKE TOUGHEST ISSUE IN 80s;
HOW ASBESTOS PRODUCER HANDLES DELAYED RESPONSE TO ACTS OF DECADES AGO

"The issue of the 80s is going to be how we as a society, as a gov't, as corporations & industries, deal with hazards that existed when no one knew they were hazards -- and are just coming to light," believes Curt Linke, Johns-Manville sr. dir. corp rels (Denver). Asbestos is his bugaboo. But similar problems are predicted for color tv, microwave ovens as well as chemical wastes. (See prr 8/14/78 for Love Canal story.) Major Boston Globe feature reports 1850 suits against asbestos mfrs. asking \$2 billion in damages. Insurance companies will no longer underwrite product liability. Here's how J-M is squaring off against monumental problem:

1. Apply historical perspective, ask for "risk benefit assessment." Over the years asbestos has saved many more lives than it has taken, via fire protection, brake linings, other vital uses. Linke asserts company operated under US Public Health Service guidelines, but in light of present medical knowledge they were in error. Position is that J-M should not be held accountable for that.

2. "Our strategy is just to tell the truth. Because the facts support our contention that we are not guilty, did not cover-up, but acted responsibly in light of contemporary medical knowledge."

3. PR reports directly to CEO, has "total management support." Chmn John McKinney was asked at PRSA seminar how corp rels dep't relates to him: "On the asbestos issue, we work daily, almost hourly together."

4. Build instant response capability. Dep't has two people who can "pretty much answer any asbestos questions they're hit with, have authority to do so, know pretty well what they can and can't say." Now educating other pr staff on issue. This is part of emergency plan for next year, when company anticipates courts will hear 4 or 5 cases each week, dep't will get dozens of calls daily.

J-M SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY POLICY

1. Those persons inadvertently injured by overexposure to asbestos should be compensated.
2. Company will care for those injured in its facilities.
3. Gov't should compensate those hurt in gov't controlled facilities. (For example, shipyard workers where gov't specified J-M products, controlled work practices & environment.) Company is not responsible because it did not control environment.
4. Joint fund should be established for those who fall between the cracks, such as wives of workers.
5. J-M's obligation is to its employees. Company believes very strongly in its responsibility to protect workers within the work environment.

"The consumer movement has grown, both in numbers and sophistication. We aren't picketing the corner Safeway these days; we are over at the Executive Office Building participating in an anti-inflation planning meeting with Alfred Kahn. We aren't boycotting meat anymore. We're eating less of it, and we're supporting the Dietary Goals and the developing Nutrition Guidelines that tell us the health risks of eating less meat are non-existent and the benefits are significant. We aren't leafletting; we're writing food policy legislation. We aren't demanding meetings with our supermarket managers. We are sitting on agency advisory committees that make food policies that affect supermarkets.

"Ten years ago I didn't know what backhaul meant. Now I am writing trucking de-regulation comments. Ten years ago my biggest concern about milk was that there be enough in the house for breakfast. Now I am testifying on milk price supports."

-- Ellen Haas to SOCAP Exchange
(Write prr for full text)

TMI STUDY PLEASES FEW
BUT REASSERTS POWER
OF PUBLIC OPINION

Report of presidential commission on Three Mile Island pleased neither pro- nor anti-nukes, and certainly not the regulators. Overall effect may benefit practitioners in efforts to show that even the most powerful, well-

financed organizations or strongest advocacy campaigns are governed by the court of public opinion.

Chmn. John Kemeny told a press conference at Dartmouth (Hanover, N.H.) where he is pres., that nuclear forces have "one more chance." Unless portions of the industry undergo fundamental changes, "public confidence will be destroyed." He added, "The burden falls on the industry" to win public consent. "A couple more accidents and there won't be a nuclear industry."

Kemeny sees "motivation within the industry to make positive changes." No moratorium on nukes was advocated by his commission -- even tho 8 of 12 members favored it in some form -- because of the belief Congress and the President should have that responsibility. "As I see it," he told reporters, "there are two issues -- one is highly technical and one is a value judgment. The political process is best designed to make the decision regarding value judgment. But the floor of Congress is not a good place, for example, to resolve the merits of coal vs. nuclear energy."

Underlying cause of TMI accident, he said, was "the overriding feeling (within the industry) that the industry is so safe there is no fear of accidents." This verifies statements to prr for special TMI issue (4/23). Dpr for utility operating the plant said then company had not planned for such a "far out scenario."

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

AWARDS. Edward L. Bernays pioneer pr professional, receives President's Award from Int'l Public Relations Assn for his contribution to better worldwide understanding. Award has gone to Nobel Peace Found. & Int'l Red Cross. Bernays, now 88, laid down practices of pr profession in his book, Crystallizing Public Opinion, 1923.
PEOPLE. Elizabeth Ann Kovacs named exec vp, PRSA, effective Jan. '80. Now exec dir Assn for Advancement of Behavior Therapy, also Soc of Behavioral Medicine (NYC).



5. PR keeps completely informed on technical, medical, legal aspects. Staff covers all key events -- major trials, testimony, scientific or OSHA conferences.

6. Create awareness of link with smoking. "But for cigarette smoking, lung cancer among asbestos workers would not be a significant problem," J-M annual report notes. Linke sees smoking as moral issue for nation. Company bans it in asbestos plants. Will not hire anyone who smokes. Offers Smokenders program for employees who want to quit. Payment is pro rata for sessions attended; if don't stick it out, employee pays difference.

7. Focus attention on helping afflicted. "Attention today should be on how those suffering from asbestos-related diseases can be properly and fairly compensated rather than assessing blame," CEO wrote in hard-hitting cover letter sent with annual report. (For J-M's pragmatic tactics for dealing with media, see 10/29 issue.)

MEDIA SAY GOV'T COMMUNICATORS DO BETTER JOB THAN CORPORATE COUNTERPARTS; PREFER FEATURE STORIES

Corporate practitioners who feel they've been servicing the media well may want to reevaluate. Informal survey by Nat'l Newspaper Assn. finds

one-third of editors say gov't releases are more useful than corporate counterparts. One-quarter believe business does better job, 44% rate two groups as equal.

On balance, however, neither group scores high marks. 80% of editors perceive releases as having "marginal value," according to NNA exec. vp William Mullen. He told Nat'l Assn of Gov't Communicators that 9 out of every 10 releases land in waste-baskets. Complaints are traditional: no local angle, untimely, requires heavy or complete rewriting.

HOW MEDIA RANK GOV'T RELEASES

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>
Grammar	46%	38%	12%
Format	28%	38%	24%
Journalistic Style	10%	46%	34%
Newsworthiness	2%	38%	52%
Clarity	8%	50%	38%
Timeliness	18%	40%	38%
Conciseness	2%	38%	52%

(Totals vary because respondents did not answer all questions.)

Since business sends out more releases, it stands greater chance of meeting circular file. Federal gov't prepares better materials. But state & local gov't are more likely to provide editors with local or regional interest.

Somewhat surprising is large number of editors who prefer feature releases when appropriate (44%) to straight news (38%). Features should generally be kept to 500 words. News stories from 100-300 words, say most editors, the shorter the better.

N.A.A.C.P. KILLS PR DEP'T, NOW BLAMES MEDIA FOR FISCAL WOES

Explaining financial predicament facing pioneering civil rights organization in emergency appeal mailing, exec dir Ben Hooks "blames the news media for part of the association's fiscal problem. The press, he asserted, gives a lot of space to outspoken 'gadflies' but very little to moderates such as the N.A.A.C.P." Quotation is from NYTimes clip sent with fund-raiser.

Article reports one way of cutting costs: "A new communications department set up earlier this year has been dismantled and its staff let go."

Being "moderate" doesn't mean being silent, or unimaginative, or unable to tailor message strategies that attract widespread attention. N.A.A.C.P. has dpr, Paul Brock. (He did not return prr's calls over a 2-day period.) Is his only a publicity unit, with little voice in policy? Surely an organization with this one's record can make news thru policies & actions. PR pros could have it in the media in no time -- assuming publicity will help and that structure, goals or performance aren't the real difficulty.

Phil Lesly wrote in last week's managing the human climate that the art is to create "a sharply defined concept, that makes the media pay attention." Blaming the press remains an unpersuasive copout.

-- Patrick Jackson

SOCAP CONFERENCE HEARS REPORTS OF MUTUAL ACCOMMODATIONS BY ACTIVISTS, INDUSTRY

Public relations practitioners are "social technicians" skilled at achieving accommodation between groups battling in the court of public opinion, according to Edward L. Bernays. Ellen

Haas, Consumer Federation of America pres., told Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals 6th Annual Exchange consumers & industry representatives will work together "more than they ever have in the past. I believe that forging unusual alliances may be the most effective route for consumers who seek to represent the public interest."

Haas traced improved relationships between activists & industry. Both realize issues are "a lot grayer than they are black and white." On food & nutrition issues, for example, gov't, industry, academic, medical & consumer sectors "synchronize through pushing and pulling and rubbing up against each other."

Litigation model of product regulation will give way to the bargaining model, predicts Tim Ryles, pres., Nat'l Ass'n of Consumer Agency Administrators. Litigation is faulty in assuming there is a "definite right and wrong answer to highly complex subjects"; and in discouraging direct communication between parties.

Example, announced jointly last week by U.S. gov't & auto industry, is AUTOCAPS, or Automotive Consumer Action Programs. Voluntary complaint handling system provides panels to hear consumers who have gotten nowhere with dealers. Panels will have "not less than 50%" consumer or non-industry representation; will be open to press coverage; must publicize their availability; and must make decisions binding on dealers.