

3. News center or press headquarters facilitates One Clear Voice strategy.
4. Press-only telephones or hotlines are essential. They are media's most important tool. To get phones installed quickly, call press rels dep't at local telephone company, recommends AT&T media rels supvr, Jay Grossman. "They more than anyone understand your needs," can put you in touch with right operating people.
5. Don't be afraid to say you don't know. But do give specific time to have answers. Explain by saying you want to keep everyone fully informed -- but also want to be accurate.
6. Don't believe your own publicity. Nuclear pr has so emphasized unlikelihood of accident, practitioners & management began to believe one was impossible. There is a difference. Met Ed's Seldomridge suggests a plan "that would cover any situation -- even the most far out scenario."

STRATEGY PROBLEM: WHAT IF  
CARTER'S VISIT FAILED TO CALM FEAR?

To assuage elevating apprehension of radiation dangers, President & Mrs. Carter visited Three Mile Island plant. They went near

height of crisis, when engineers were laboring to reduce significant hydrogen bubble in reactor -- procedure for which no one could predict outcome. They were photographed within yards of core housing at time when nearby residents were being evacuated.

Despite need to calm public, particularly in threatened region, timing of visit raises question. One is safety of Chief Executive who can't stroll on White House lawn without bevy of secret service men. More pertinent is dubious pr strategy.

What if crisis continued after his visit? What tactic would then remain to calm fears? What more credible authority could be called in -- the Pope? Could Carter go back a second time and be believed? Would fear be out of control with no one left to speak credibly because President of U.S. had already spoken?

Strategy specialist Pat Jackson (Jackson, Jackson & Wagner, Epping, N.H.) classifies messages by four types: 1) to inform, 2) to question, 3) to persuade, 4) to calm. Latter is most difficult, he believes. "The safe rule is not to use your most believable source first. Yet organizations do so regularly, leaving no room to maneuver."

For instance, in issue debates or when attacked, CEOs usually speak for their organizations. If make error or misstatement, however innocent, no second voice of higher authority is available to correct or mitigate. Jackson feels this is one reason pr people are increasingly used as spokesmen. Drive to get CEOs to go before press & public needs to be redirected to include an array of top execs & specialists.

WHO'S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

PEOPLE. Hank Schafran joins Arnold & Co. (Boston) as dpr...Stuart E. Karu becomes pres & ceo, Henry J. Kaufman & Assocs (D.C.) Donald G. Softness resigns from The Softness Group (NYC); John Softness becomes ceo & sole owner.

Norma Manson become pres, PRI of Hawaii (Hilo)...W. W. Marsh is named pres, The Rockey Co. Inc. (Portland, Ore.)...Sue H. Glick joins Benton & Bowles (NYC) as assoc dpr...Public Communications (Miami) names Rich Steck gen'l mgr.

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THREE MILE ISLAND CASE STUDY: WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE DONE?  
EASY CRITICISM OBSCURES VALUE AS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

If you had been dpr of a participant in Pennsylvania's recent nuclear incident, what would you have done; or done differently? Pondering this question may be a uniquely educative experience for public relations professionals. Today's world adds high tech accidents and terrorism to traditional natural disasters & labor strife.

It's easy but valueless to criticize performance of Metropolitan Edison, utility operating the plant, Nuclear Regulatory Commission or state officials. What may be useful is for profession to make unfortunate event a case study for better future performance. Interviews with practitioners involved explain course of events.

BACKGROUND. Plant problems started around 4 a.m. First person in Met Ed's communications dep't arrived at hdqtrs around 7 a.m., rest around 8 a.m. That's when dep't first apprised of situation. Calls were already starting to come in from press all over country, eventually world. Answered calls around the clock. No time to eat, "go to powder room." Weren't equipped with enough staff to handle that large a situation. "We were caught completely off guard. I don't know how any utility, no matter how good sized its staff, can be prepared for an incident of this magnitude," Howard Seldomridge, dir. public & internal communications, told pr reporter.

"We do have emergency communications plans for blackouts, brownouts, storms, floods -- but none to cover this situation."

-- Metropolitan Edison Co.

"Emergency plan? ... We have nothing down on paper. We use our own judgment as the situation develops."

-- Nuclear Regulatory Commission

On approximately day three, NRC got involved. Met Ed had held 2-3 press conferences by then. NRC took over info release, on agreement with utility. Met Ed pres. issued explanatory statement:

"The company believes that during this very important period, day-to-day detailed technical information on the plant and recovery operation should come from a single source. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission as a gov't agency is in a unique interpretive position to provide status reports. In order to minimize confusion and misinterpretation of complex and changing data, the company for the present defers to the NRC as the single source."

MEDIA ARRANGEMENTS. Met Ed originally thought of holding press conference in Reading headquarters or Lebanon. But press people were descending on site, also were all over headquarters. So set up news center in Hershey office, nine

miles from site. Simultaneously began setting up news center at site, moving trailers there. Now being called "Trailer City," where GPU (Met Ed parent), NRC, Met Ed, contractors, architects, engineers are located.

Main reason for site trailer was to handle breaking news. Telephone lines jammed at first, hard to get info from Three Mile Island. Several telephone companies involved in providing service to area, so establishing new phone lines "quite a chore."

Met Ed slowly began referring calls from hdqtrs to Hershey. Then relinquished Hershey operation, began referring calls to "Trailer City." At one point three info centers -- Reading, Hershey & site -- "which spread us out pretty thin."

NRC ROLE. Decided it was important info come from one central office. This should be news center at site. "At some point you have to establish something so news media and public aren't running around in circles. It's essential to have information coming out accurately and so that everyone can understand it," John Kopeck, pa ofcr, told prr. But Met Ed people are not in NRC news center.

Asked if pa dep't determines what info goes out, Kopeck sidestepped. Role of pa people unclear beyond servicing media. NRC has written only two formal news releases. Instead issues daily, internal technical document called "preliminary notifications" directly to media. Data gathered by NRC inspectors. Pa counseling role dubious, apparently technical experts are in charge -- even though that situation at Met Ed earlier was judged responsible for much bad press.

Joseph Fouchard, NRC dpa, went immediately to site from Washington hdqtrs, has been there since coordinating efforts. Press & public interest unabated for updates and post-mortems.

MET ED STAFFER'S SUGGESTIONS FOR FELLOW PROFESSIONALS

"In-house pr people, no matter what the industry might be, have to be totally familiar with the entire operations of the company. Normally pr people don't get into the nuts-and-bolts kinds of things. In our case, a greater awareness of how nuclear plants in fact operate, understanding a primary cooling system, secondary system, the reactor core, the pressurizer -- all these kinds of terms -- would have helped," Seldomridge told prr.

Staff had "some knowledge." However, to be prepared for anything like this "pr people have to be completely familiar with their company's operations, their products, plants, whatever." Task is especially difficult when industry is involved in a comparatively young technology. "You've got to have all the answers."

Seldomridge reports many offers came from other utilities wanting to assist. "All were anxious to learn so they could be better prepared themselves."

QUOTES TO SHOW YOUR MANAGEMENT OR CLIENT NEXT TIME THEY SUGGEST GLOSSING OVER

Helpful Experts:

"My father is a nuclear physicist in Colorado. I called him and asked what to do. I said, 'I don't want to panic.' My father said, 'Panic. Get out!'"

-- Paxton Herald, weekly serving affected area

Non Sequitur:

"If coal- or oil-fired plants had to report as often as we do, they'd have plenty of incidents to tell about, too."

-- Nuclear industry spokesman to Wall Street Journal

Belated Truth:

"When (Penn. governor) Thornburgh asked whether 'anyone in the country' knew about the health effects of the radioactive plume emitting from Three Mile Island (NRC chmn) Hendrie paused, 'Ah,' he said finally, 'not in the sense that it's been studied and understood in any real way.'"

-- Knight Ridder News Service Analysis entitled "Who's in Charge?"

Internal Bomb:

"As late as Tuesday, April 3, chief NRC counsel, James L. Kelley, was still asking: 'Who's in charge up there? Can't you guys call the shots? What's the answer to that question?'"

-- Knight Ridder Analysis For copy write prr.

Faint Praise:

"NRC limped out in passable condition, only because Harold Denton, its man on the spot, was cast against a utility executive who stopped just short of saying radiation is good for you."

-- Mary McGrory's syndicated column

Officeholder's Response:

"The arrogance displayed by Met Ed in the first several days of the nuclear accident was inexcusable and I do not want that arrogance and contempt for the public rewarded by Three Mile Island's reopening or by the customers having to automatically reimburse Met Ed for clean-up and repair costs. Clearly the choice now is between either the company profits or the future of this region and we cannot have both."

-- Pennsylvania State Representative Stephen Reed to Paxton Herald

DESPITE THE FACTS ...

Nationally syndicated cartoonist Oliphant drew a melted down nuke, with white-coated scientists looking disbelievingly both at it and at a spokesman standing behind a microphone-laden podium. The spokesman is saying, "I repeat -- these is no real cause for alarm...." On the podium are the words "public relations."

LEARNING FROM OTHERS' PROBLEMS: SOME RULES OF PRACTICE

1. Emergency plans are no longer frills. They're the fire or safety drills of public relations. But they need to be practiced. Merely having a plan and keeping it updated is not enough (NRC should make this a requirement for nuke operators). For copies of Bob Barbour's "Guidelines for Drawing Up Public Relations Emergency & Disaster Plans," write prr.
2. Single spokesman is needed from the start. Or coordinated team (no more than two or three) who share same info, can speak with One Clear Voice. In regulated industries, or trade groups, this means policy and plan must be in place in advance.