

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE
1983-84 ORAL REPORT TO THE CMA BOARD
by John F. Hussey, Chairman
January 28, 1985

I

BOARD-LEVEL COMMUNICATIONS STUDY

Board involvement and leadership. A special committee, composed of officers and members of the Board, should be appointed to examine the need for a strengthened communications program. Its objective should be to find ways to modify negative public attitudes toward the chemical industry. It should examine current data and perceptions, analyze their potential impact upon the health of the industry, consider the various communications options, and deliver findings and recommendations as soon as is feasible. A task force of the Communications Committee should be organized to cooperate with and serve the Board study.

Objective: educate the Board as to the short and long-term issues raised by the rising tide of negative public perceptions and make recommendations for a broadly-based communications program to address the situation.

I. BOARD-LEVEL COMMUNICATIONS STUDY (cont'd)

Benefit: provide a communications platform which will preserve our right to operate by bringing to public attention the positive contributions of the chemical industry and easing the fear of chemicals.

II

COMMUNITY/GOVERNMENT BRIEFINGS

Reach government leaders. With government relations and state CICs, set up an ad hoc team of CMA and industry experts which would have two specific communications projects.

1. Communicate with all professional associations which represent large groups of government officials such as the National Association of Counties, League of Cities, Conference of Mayors, National Governors Conference, the Conference of State Legislatures, the Association of Attorneys General and the like.
2. Pull together a series of seminars throughout the nation to reinforce the training, and hence the confidence, of local officials in the matter of chemical industry safety and procedures.

Objective: quickly demonstrate that CMA is anxious to answer any questions about industry safety.

Benefit: Blunt any precipitous legislative initiatives on the local, state or regional level.

III

CHEMICAL DIALOGUE

Start talking more effectively. Under auspices of the Keystone Foundation or similar organization, initiate and support a permanent dialogue process with those interest groups whose power and influence are most likely to result in further political pressure against the chemical industry. Build upon our experience with Clean Sites, but focus the subject upon chemical manufacturing and risk assessment. (This is fully consistent with the Board's stated principle that: "We will foster continuing dialogue with a broad range of groups who are also concerned about the impact of chemicals and hazardous waste on health and the environment.")

Objective: improve the lines of communication.

Benefit: prevent any ground-swell of new pressure for legislation and regulation.

IV

PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Get the facts. Contract with a public opinion research firm like Cambridge or Yankelovich to develop and analyze hard data on attitudes of key segments of the American public toward the chemical industry. Use this data to determine the specific nature and direction of future CMA communications and resource allocation. Establish benchmark information against which to measure the effectiveness of any communications program.

Objective: Obtain specific numbers to inform CMA leadership about the opinions of our most important target publics.

Benefit: Guide industry toward cost-effective programs tailored to the specific requirements of key thought-leader groups.

V

RIGHT-TO-KNOW

Develop a model program. The Communications Committee strongly endorses moves within CMA to develop a proactive position on right-to-know. This position should be effectively organized and communicated to the public, thus positioning the chemical industry as part of the solution to local concerns. Participate in drafting model Federal legislation, but be prepared also to support responsible local initiatives, perhaps through the League of Cities.

Objective: help solve a perceived problem and avoid further polarization.

Benefit: move industry toward solving publicly-perceived problem.

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VI

CHEM-CALL

Establish an 800 number. Located at CMA headquarters, this number would handle calls from citizens, members of the news media, government personnel, and representatives of interest groups throughout the U.S. (This project would become a segment of the task force's proposed National Chemical Information Center.) The CMA would hire temporaries and train them to handle or re-direct inquiries, to provide information to ease citizen concerns whenever possible, and by collecting data, contribute to CMA's measurement of the status of public fears. The success of any such project would depend in large measure upon awareness of the existence of the number. It would have to be publicized and advertised in major newspapers and magazines.

Objective: reassure the public about chemical industry safety.

Benefit: position the chemical industry as concerned and responsive to citizen interests and ease pressures for legislative "solutions".

VII

SPEAK-OUT

Go on the offensive. Establish and coordinate an industry-wide "speak out" program in two parts.

1. A speakers bureau of CMA and company spokespersons prepared to go virtually anywhere, anytime, to speak on industry issues to concerned groups.
2. A loaned manager program wherein qualified, middle managers from companies would be assigned to CMA for a one-month period of training and involvement in media tours, spokesmanship, interviews, etc.

Objective: demonstrate to the public the chemical industry's positive impact upon the economy and quality of life.

Benefit: offset the negative image created by incidents like Bhopal and Love Canal.

VIII

EXPAND THE AUDIENCE

Advertise! Over the longer term, the industry must utilize the most effective means of communicating broadly with all important audiences. Even the most sophisticated and effective public relations, community relations and government relations effort cannot achieve our objectives alone. To complete the communications package will require advertising -- the only means in existence for the chemical industry to tell its story, in words of its own choosing, and tailored in such a manner as to reach each key audience. We recommend a finely tuned and carefully researched process that will develop meticulously selected advertising to augment all other elements of the CMA's communications program. We cannot over emphasize that a communications plan without advertising is not likely to achieve the major changes in public attitudes desired by the industry.

Objective: to quickly and dramatically create awareness of the benefits "today's" chemical industry brings to society while realistically demonstrating response to public concerns.

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VIII. EXPAND THE AUDIENCE (cont'd)

Benefit: move general public (and thought leader) attitudes to the more positive end of the spectrum, thereby creating an audience less likely to generate or sanction "panic" initiatives.

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