

REMARKS TO CMA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
By William M. Metten Jr.
Chairman, Communications Committee
January 10, 1983

The Communications Committee appreciates this opportunity to bring you up-to-date on our industry's communications programs, priorities and problems. In the next few minutes I would like to outline a new direction in the focus of our communications program, share with you several examples of how CMA communications activities support our industry's goals, and, lastly, touch on the future communications challenges facing our industry.

But first, a brief overview of how the public perceives the chemical industry may be of interest. The negative perception that the public has of our industry has not changed. The public believes that the industry is irresponsible in its management of wastes and is unwilling to deal with critical environmental issues unless forced by federal and state legislation.

The public's perception of us as bad guys is influenced and reinforced by a news media which is steadily chipping away at the private enterprise fabric of our society...by docu-dramas that portray business and businessmen as dishonest and motivated by money alone...by the outcries of environmentalists and self-styled protectors of the public interest.

It's no wonder, is it, that opinion survey after opinion survey shows such a negative public attitude toward our industry with the hazardous waste issue the foremost issue preoccupying the public's perception. And like it or not, perception equals reality in the public's mind.

Our cause is not aided either by the fact that the Administration, because of economic and other political considerations, has not been able to provide the leadership necessary to influence legislative activities to deal with the problems of our industry.

Within the past six months CMA's communications program has undergone a significant change in direction. Three factors are primarily responsible for bringing about this change. One will certainly come as no surprise to anyone in this room -- the economy has not been kind to our industry. In this adverse economic climate, the Communications Committee recognized the need to reduce communications expenditure, a decision consistent with actions taken by many member companies. As you know, a substantial reduction in CMA communications expenditures occurred in the print advertising area. As a result of eliminating the national print advertising program, the 1982 ChemCAP assessment has been reduced from 40 percent to 20 percent.

The second factor contributing to a change in the direction of our communications program is a closer liaison with CMA's Government Relations Committee.

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A strong relationship between Government Relations and Communications is essential when you consider the necessity for our industry's communications to be focused around and in support of the legislative issues facing our industry. A stronger bridge has been built between the Communications and Government Relations Committees for cross-fertilization of ideas and planning communications strategies and building constituencies. This is a relatively recent marriage. At this point, both partners are enthusiastic about the opportunities for coordinating CMA communications more closely with government relations objectives. We look forward to the day when this approach bears fruit.

The third element of the new direction in our industry's communications activities is a desire to try new and different approaches in our ongoing commitment to reshape the public's negative perception of our industry. We recognize that we are locked into a constant and shifting battle for the public's understanding and support. Results are difficult to come by. Victories are few. But we must vote present on the issues and use every means at our disposal to communicate the industry's accomplishments and commitment on industry issues. We have initiated two activities which illustrate the use of innovative communications approaches to accomplish these objectives. One involves a pilot regional communications program in cooperation with the Louisiana Chemical Association.

This program will be tailored to that state's communications priorities, and the leadership is being provided by Louisiana Chemical Association and its member companies. Funds are being made available from our communications budget for one year. The Louisiana experiment begins this month. We hope that the experience gained will be useful in developing model communications programs for use in other states to develop public policy support at the grass roots level.

Another innovative approach involves a grass roots communications program in support of clean water. This is the first time that we have targeted a single message within key congressional districts to build a coalition of supporters and activate a public relations campaign at the grass roots level. Here again, this is a learning experience, and we are hopeful that it will produce results which can be applied elsewhere.

Personally speaking, I am excited about these new approaches and the new direction that our communications program is taking. I know that our Communications Committee shares this feeling. The members of our committee -- your employees -- have contributed greatly to shape and guide these new communications activities.

Now I would like to touch on the other communications activities which continue to play an important role in CMA's overall communications program.

I am referring to such activities as:

- CMA's media tours which are planned around a specific issue and targeted for maximum impact in geographical areas and congressional districts. Media tours consistently delivered results, and we are increasing the tours in 1983.

- Broadcast communications is another results-oriented communications activity. CMA now broadcasts a regular series of three-minute radio features dedicated to major issues of the association and distributed bi-weekly to 1900 stations.

- The balanced television newsfeed continues to be a key ingredient in our news activities. For example, we fed a recent feature on Superfund via satellite to more than 400 stations.

- Consumer Information programming -- this activity continues to generate results and good will for our industry and maintains mutually beneficial relations between CMA and consumer, public interest, educational and other influential groups. The objective here is also to advocate our position on major issues as well as provide a forum for member companies to talk about their individual product benefits.

At conventions like the American Women in Radio and Television, industry experts are interviewed on a variety of subjects. In the aftermath of the train derailment at Livingston, Louisiana, CMA's Chemtrec staff and news service department turned some adverse circumstances into a positive media experience.

In the time remaining I would like to take a prospective look at the major issues confronting our industry and suggest some ways that our Communications Committee is considering addressing the issues in support of our industry's position.

The biggest single issue which adversely affects the public's perception of our industry is hazardous waste disposal. Notwithstanding efforts by our member companies and an ongoing program by CMA itself, the public perceives that they are at great risk from chemical wastes. The hazardous waste issue has such a grip on the national consciousness that this single issue affects the public's perception on other industry issues such as clean air and clean water. Later on today, I will have the opportunity to address the public perception of hazardous waste issues as part of a Waste Management Plan presentation to be considered by the Executive Committee.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of individuals on our committee and thank you for contributing their advice and counsel on the tough communications problems our industry is facing. Their efforts continue to make a real contribution to our program. I also wish to acknowledge the efforts of CMA's communications staff whose enthusiasm and commitment on behalf of our industry is a key element in the progress we have made in recent months.

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