

CRISIS RESPONSE

To complicate matters, Johns-Manville was in the midst of moving its corporate headquarters from New York City to Denver. I had already announced my decision not to go West with the company and would therefore be without a job in early 1972. Raines had already left to join Union Pacific as public relations director, so I was left alone to handle the affairs of the trade association as it was entering its most trying period. In late December I was asked to fly to Buffalo, New York, to meet with Al Fay of National Gypsum, who was then president of the AIA/NA, to discuss my taking over the reins as executive director, which I agreed to do, effective January 1.

The EPA hearings were physically grueling, but from a PR standpoint they were a piece of cake. The media was obsessed with the occupational health aspects of the asbestos issue, but had not yet latched onto the environmental implications. Media coverage of the first hearings, held in New York, was zero. The Manville folks held center stage but since the industry had already turned its back on the sprayed asbestos people there was little controversy to attract attention.

The next hearings were held in Los Angeles a week later. The Association was the primary testifier and the only opposition came from a local chapter of the Sierra Club, which tried desperately to build a case that the asbestos industry was damaging the California environment. It didn't make a lot of sense since the entire northern half of the state was a bed of low-grade asbestos ore. Clearly, the environmental community was waking up to the asbestos issue, but it would be a long time before they understood it sufficiently to present a coherent case for increased environmental controls.

Following the Los Angeles hearings, I flew to London to consult with our English colleagues "over breakfast" on the EPA proposals. I left that same evening reassured that our position on the environmental asbestos standards was scientifically sound. The final hearings held that same week in East St. Louis were a total no-show. Not a single individual or organization appeared to testify. The whole thing was over in 20 minutes and I flew home for a much-needed rest. The real fight, the OSHA hearings, was coming up shortly.

OSHA Hearings: Through the Wringer

Nothing in the PR textbooks helped us prepare for the OSHA public hearings that began in February 1972 in the Labor Department auditorium on Constitution Avenue in Washington, D.C. We were, as they say, making it up as we went along. The strategy was simple: J-M would address the health issue and the Association would discuss economic impact and the specific changes we wanted in the proposed standards. Tactically, we set up an AIA/NA Information Center in a suite in the Madison Hotel, a few blocks from where the hearings were being held. From

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