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"Some companies are responding by bearing their souls," he said. "And some are waiting for federal regulations to tell them to divulge information. At Dow we can see the handwriting on the wall and we are being open now before we are told to do it."

"The voluntary approach is not going to guarantee that communities are protected," said Martha Broad, a resource specialist with the Natural Resources Defense Council, a national organization. "What is needed is a systematic regulatory scheme that discloses how much is being produced at a plant and how much is being emitted."

Support for such regulation strengthened significantly last summer after a Union Carbide plant in Institute, W. Va., released a cloud of toxic chemicals, causing 135 community residents to be hospitalized.

- That event also occurred after Union Carbide Chairman Warren M. Anderson had predicted that his company's Bhopal disaster could never occur at one of its U.S. facilities. While no deaths occurred in West Virginia, the plant does produce the same pesticide as the Bhopal facility, methyl isocyanate.

He said the company has, among this year.

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WASHINGTON — Since the release of deadly gas one year ago from a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India, the chemical industry has sought to repair its tarnished public image in U.S. communities where plants are located.

Industry officials insist that the Dec. 3, 1984, disaster in Bhopal, which caused at least 1,750 deaths and sickened about 300,000 persons, has forced U.S. companies to be more open about the chemicals that are produced, stored and sometimes released into the environment near their plants.

For an industry that is more used to guarding information about its products, the new ap-

proach has been difficult. Some firms have abstained from any image-building, while others, like Dow Chemical Co., have spent millions of dollars on public relations, including network television ads.

Moreover, environmental groups and legislators in Congress say the industry hasn't done enough to help residents of plant communities understand the dangers they face in an accident.

"We recognize that we have a problem, that Bhopal was damaging to our image," said Jeffrey C. Van, spokesman for the Chemical Manufacturers Association, whose members account for 90 percent of the production of basic chemicals in the U.S. and Canada.

"Our job is to rebuild our reputation and we are doing this around the country. By making

our industry more open, we can cut through the perceived mystery about what we do."

The industry's campaign has centered, in part, on a Community Awareness and Emergency Response program, which is designed to get plant managers involved in explaining what goes on at their facilities. Some companies also are releasing information from internal safety audits.

"In the last year this industry has undergone more scrutiny than any year before," said Richard K. Long, manager of external communications for Dow Chemical. "It's been more than during Love Canal and the beginning of the debate over Superfund," he said, referring to the discovery in the 1970s of the Love Canal

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