

MEMORANDUM TO: VCM-PVC Producers Committee
VCM-PVC Communications Committee

DATE: September 14, 1976

SUBJECT: Report on Key Cities Briefing Program

Major News Centers Covered

As part of the VCM-PVC "Action Program", a series of thirty-seven "editorial briefings" have been conducted in eight major news centers around the country. Six additional briefings currently are in the planning stage; we have been trying to complete them by late September and then move on to additional major centers such as Seattle/Portland, Washington and New York.

After professionally training industry representatives in TV and radio techniques, Hill and Knowlton and its associate firms arranged briefings in:

- o Tampa/St. Petersburg - 4/22/76
- o Atlanta - 4/23/76
- o Pittsburgh - 6/22/76
- o Boston - 6/23/76
- o Denver - 6/24/76
- o Salt Lake City - 6/25/76
- o Minneapolis - 6/29/76
- o Detroit - 6/30/76

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Currently, briefings have been scheduled in San Francisco/Los Angeles (9/16-17) and St. Louis/Chicago (9/20-21); we are attempting to arrange briefings in Baton Rouge and New Orleans as well.

In addition, the VCM-PVC Communications Committee established a policy to extend the reach of the program by considering having experienced company representatives with heavy plant commitments in certain cities organize their own editorial briefings; H&K would be available for counsel and minor assistance with press arrangements. This would increase the number of briefings within the current budget parameters.

Sixteen industry representatives were trained by H&K. Three briefing teams were organized involving nine representatives (those trained and not participating have not done so either because they were considered unsuited for the exposure, declined participation or have had business commitments).

Review of Procedure

H&K and its associates briefed the editorial people in advance and handled all physical arrangements. We also prepared and left behind discussion materials.

The briefing teams spent one day in each city, averaging five one-hour meetings per city, accompanied by H&K's representatives and/or those of its associate firms. H&K and/or associates made follow-up contact with the press to get reactions.

While it is possible to expand the number of meetings by spending more time in each city, in most cases the limited potential for increased productivity on the VCM/PVC health issue causes us to recommend against this course. Once the one or two leading newspapers and top broadcast news outlets have been covered, value for time spent drops off sharply. Further, although newspapers offer a better opportunity for substantive discussion, broadcast outlets remain valuable in terms of on-air exposure for industry spokesmen.

Press Reaction

In H&K's opinion, the series of briefings already conducted were of quality and value to industry and media alike -- in terms of concept as well as substance. The following selection of comments received from H&K people after the teams' visits suggests that positive far outweigh any possible negative impressions left behind:

o Tampa:

- "Try to focus the briefing on discussing how or why an industry-acknowledged workplace health problem continually is portrayed as being a wide problem despite all evidence to the contrary."
- "Seek to play down the emphasis on government meddling in industry affairs, this sounds too much like a traditional business pitch."

o Atlanta:

- Newspaper editor said the session was very helpful and that it gave him a very good general overview of a major problem. He said that the complaint about arbitrary decisions being made by government is "a standard line, an almost universal complaint of all business." And he says he related to this because it "is so obviously true."
- He thought that the advance filling-in, the backgrounder that was supplied before the meeting, and the quality of the representatives "all were first rate."
- Radio newsman was put off a bit by all the emphasis on criticism of bureaucracy because "it got in the way of learning more about the issue and its resolution."

o Pittsburgh:

- "The three industry representatives answered every question put to them intelligently and in detail. They were cooperative."

o Boston:

- The (radio) people expressed concern about their inability to fully appreciate industry positions on critical and complicated questions such as VCM/PVC and health. (Note: general situation in broadcast news operations -- rip and read regional and national news coming over the wires, intense coverage of local news happenings; yield: no cumulative perspective on national issues, particularly as they relate to the industrial sector.)
- (Newspaper) made a point about the PVC and Health document: complained that it developed information on those studies favorable to the industry position, but ignored those that disagreed.

o Denver:

- The transition from VCM/PVC to risk/benefit of chemicals in general and the inflationary cost of unnecessarily high standards was nicely accomplished.
- The briefing team impressed the newspaper personnel with industry's unheralded role in identifying the problem and correcting it. (Editor), especially, was visibly impressed that Dr. Johnson was one of the doctors who had discovered the relation of VCM to cancer, and reported it.

A general comment on the 30-page backgrounder: unless in most locations the media are more knowledgeable than they were in Denver, some of the material might throw up unnecessary red flags. Specifically -- the area of birth defects, which may be a moot question, is very detailed, and gives the impression that it is unknown rather than unrelated...the appendix was very good, as the media seemed to refer to that and cited it in questions.

o Salt Lake City:

- A program of follow-up contact is needed by SPI, since in each interview requests for more information were made. The possibility of a toll-free number was mentioned by the team and well received by the media.
- Common question: how does industry feel standards should be established?
- Newspaper editor took copious notes and once remarked, "You've certainly opened my eyes..." referring to the fact that he hadn't realized the importance of risk analysis until now...all agreed that visits by industry are very important and always welcomed.

o Minneapolis:

- This is a progressive program and several editors said they expected to see more people from industry out on tour to talk over their concerns and problems with the media. All agree it is a good idea.

Evaluation

The preceeding comments represent a true cross-section of press reaction, as recorded by H&K and its associates at the briefings and in follow-up contacts, and from the comments it is clear that the mere fact that industry established the initiative to openly discuss controversial issues is positive, welcome and valuable.

If there is one key point which is made indelibly, and to which media representatives -- whatever their prevailing attitude toward industry -- have no rebuttal, it is: scientific questions need to be resolved on a scientific basis before they become publicized and politicized into lives of their own without respect to their factual basis. To cement this truth throughout the major opinion centers does more than head off precipitous negative reporting, it helps build a foundation for proper dialogue in the public sector.

Members of the SPI-VC briefing teams expressed some surprise at the general lack of detailed understanding they found with respect to the vinyl chloride issue. They felt the need to do more basic explaining than had been anticipated.

On the other hand, they found the media people generally not to be antagonistic toward industry -- contrary to preconceptions they had formed -- with a few exceptions. It became clear that industry can expect and obtain better media response and coverage if it will continue taking the initiative and talking issues over with the press.

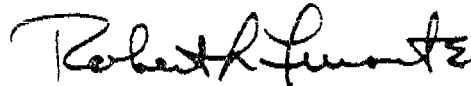
Finally, the opportunity to discuss risk/benefit analysis is a valuable one, having significance for the industry beyond the VCM/PVC situation. We believe it is imperative that the media grasp the subject of risk/benefit analysis which affects proper, balanced news and editorial treatment of VCM/PVC and future issues.

Fine-tuning Briefing Presentation

The foregoing suggests certain fine-tuning of our presentation.

1. There is the likelihood that the media will not read and digest the full "PVC and Health" document. Coupled with the fact that high awareness of the VCM/PVC situation per se is not present in many of the media people we have talked to, it seems advisable to capsulize the VCM/PVC situation and use that as a basis for discussion. A summary of the larger paper has been prepared for this purpose; the summary will not replace the larger document but will accompany it. The larger document, in itself, helps to demonstrate our openness -- the extent to which we are prepared to discuss the issue regardless of whether the media takes advantage of it.
2. Risk/benefit analysis clearly belongs in the discussions. But, we should keep in mind that the goal of leaving the press with a feeling of candidness on our part, of our accessibility as well as our honesty is primary. This overlay should temper the degree of our vehemence in castigating government and other independent activist groups -- perceived generally as well meaning, albeit at times clumsy and ill-informed. Too much vehemence will destroy the perception by the media of our intention to seek rationality in the considerations of public health issues.
3. Our teams may work more effectively in many cities with fewer members; two may be more effective -- but the presence of a medical doctor is essential to achieve the greatest degree of acceptance by the media.

4. As has been suggested by members of the Communications Committee, periodic contact with media people reached will be cultivated. A media list, attached, will be maintained to mail pertinent material, including appropriate press releases, studies, and selected material from the VCM-PVC Management Summary.


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