COMMUNITY ADVISORY PANELS: IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES

Key concerns: Economy, environment

From the outset, the establishment of community advisory panels (CAPs) has encompassed the spirit and the practice of Responsible Care. In the course of setting up and meeting with their panels, companies have been able to gauge the concern of their neighbors, act to address those concerns, and then spread the word.

So far, out of about 2,000 sites where Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA; Washington) members run their operations, 160 CAPs have been formed. About 90% of the sites do not have such an advisory group—even leaving aside sites isolated from communities, and taking account of panels shared by several plants. But in recognition of the importance of the panels formed, and the need for information by companies that have yet to embark on panel forming, as well as the 100 or so currently being formed, *CW* visited eight panels this fall. The following summaries are provided in hopes that they will be helpful to chemical firms considering taking the plunge.



Eastman Kodak's panel in Rochester, NY.

To the credit of the companies involved, *CW* reporters visited three panels set up in communities that have suffered serious accidents in the past decade. They include a panel in the Kanawha Valley of West Virginia, where a release shortly after the 1984 Bhopal, India incident sent several hundred West Virginia residents to the hospital; Pasadena, TX, where an explosion at the Phillips Petroleum plant in 1989 caused the death of 23 workers; and Channelview, TX, where nine months later an Arco Chemical plant explosion took the lives of 17 people. These CAPs are not only building bridges, but they are trying to redress community mistrust and anger.

Five key points gleaned from the eight *CW* visits:

- Economic and job concerns are on a par, and even sometimes outweigh, environmental worries.
- The question of who gets selected from the community to sit on a panel—and, just as important, who does not—is a volatile issue.
- In contrast, some panels find that their key challenge is keeping people involved and interested, so that they show up for meetings and share their thoughts.
- Without exception, companies have found that it takes time to educate their panels about their plants, processes, and products, in order to delve into the issues. That process can take up to a full year of monthly meetings.
- Companies are finding that it can be a challenge to get their panels to think critically about their operations and to dig up their concerns. Few companies have reached the stage where they can call their panels true watchdogs for community concerns.

Summaries of CW *visits*

Aug. 11, 1992—Air Products and Chemicals, Phillips Petroleum, Shell Oil and Chemical, Lyondell Petrochemical, Crown Petroleum, Mobil Mining & Minerals—Pasadena, TX. The main presentation at this meeting was an introduction to the Harris County Pollution Prevention Dept. Company reports included one firm, which asked not to be identified, telling the group about a gasket failure that led to a flammable vapor release. The release was small, identified quickly, and did not ignite. Lyondell made a brief presentation on changes in its SARA Title III numbers, noting that there was no change in the actual amount of emissions, but rather in the types of substances that had to be reported. The company said its total emissions, therefore, would go from 1.1 million lbs in 1990 to 2.8 million lbs in 1991, despite reduction efforts.

Sept. 3—Lyondell Petrochemical, Arco Chemical—Channelview, TX. The planned meeting covered the general interpretation of SARA Title III data. A panelist asked Arco about a flaring that was observed, and questioned the company in detail on its reported benzene emissions. When the benzene discussion became heated, facilitator Diane Sheridan asked the group to make that the main topic of the next meeting. This meeting is open to the public, so at the end, visitors from several citizen groups, including Surviving Families of Petrochemical Disasters, asked Arco to meet with representatives of Texans United, arguing that to bring citizens' requests to the companies is the purpose of the panel, and more area residents than those at the table want to have input. Another heated discussion ensued. Sheridan took control of the meeting and helped the panel decide that it wants Arco to address the issues raised by the outside groups but does not want to tell the company what to do, and that for the company to meet with all groups that want time is an unfair burden to the company.

Sept. 29, Pasadena. Panelists were briefed about a new company in the group, **Aristech.** This group prefers briefings over plant visits. It was followed by a long presentation on SARA Title III.

Oct. 1—Union Carbide, Sterling Chemical, Amoco Chemical, Amoco Oil, Marathon Oil—Texas City, TX. SARA Title III information was presented, followed by an update on the industry-funded Regional Air Monitoring Network.

Nov. 9—Eastman Kodak—Rochester, NY. One presentation covered the environmental impact of the company's electric power plants, and what the company is doing to monitor and address the noise and fly ash inci-

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dents. The second presentation covered site plans for the expansion of Kodak's polyester recycling plant. Panelists asked about noise, visual effects, worker and neighborhood safety, and the costs involved in the company's efforts to make the expansion less visible to its neighbors. There was open discussion at the end with *CW* on CAP work on Responsible Care self-audit (*right*).

Nov. 12—Union Carbide's polyethylene compounding and plastics recycling unit—Bound Brook, NJ. This panel was started up in July, and has 12 of the 16 members allowed in the panel's charter. The group got a tour of the plant's manufacturing operations. The unit was built in 1938. At one time the plant produced phenolic resins, which involves hazardous substances such as formaldehyde and toluene. As a result, the panel has expressed concern about what may be left over from past operations. Carbide's plant management has agreed to work up a history of the plant and what had been produced there. The group has also asked to be involved in strategic planning, including plans for expansions, process changes, and new products.

Nov. 16—Olin—South Charleston, WV. At this meeting, the group discussed how to distribute emergency response information to the community—in particular, pamphlets describing sheltering in place techniques. They asked about emergencies: regulations, liability, and evacuation plans. The CAP is also working on a project to make the community aware of Olin as a "valued neighbor." Commented panel spokesman Rev. Richard Mahan: "We want to help keep Olin there because they provide 180 jobs."

Nov. 16—Rohm and Haas, Allied-Signal—Philadelphia. The key issue was how to reinvigorate a panel that has been meeting for seven years. The group discussed two ways to do it: adding new people to the mix and letting the panel take a much greater lead in running the meetings. The group suggested adding clergy, students, more environmentalists, an emergency response official, and an hourly worker. They discussed taking greater charge of the meetings by selecting new members themselves.

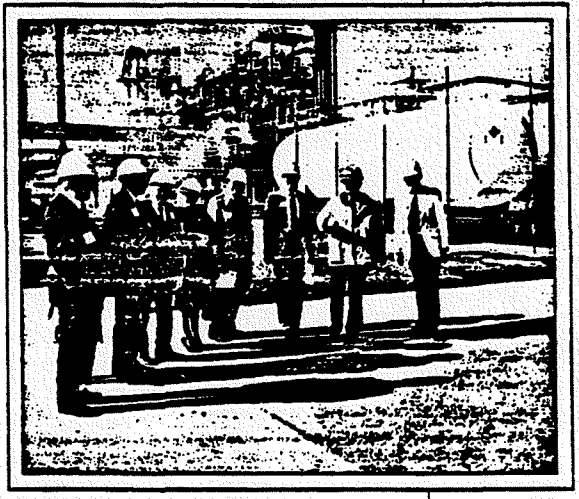
KAREN HELLER
with Gregory DL Morris, Ronald Begley, Elisabeth Kirschner, and Elizabeth S. Kiesche

PANELS WORRY ABOUT JOBS

But the focus will return to environmental issues

Responsible Care grew out of the chemical industry's need to improve its place in the public's trust, especially in the arena of safety, health, and environment. But as companies sit down with a growing number of interested members of the public, the people who live in the communities that surround chemical plants, they are hearing that another issue—economics—is of equal importance.

Eastman Kodak's (Rochester, NY) three-year-old community advisory council made a decision this year that is illustrative. The company told the council that it was expanding its roll-coating operation for the production of camera film. A key chemical in film making is methylene chloride, a toxic chemical. While the company recycles about 98%/year, minute amounts escape into the air. To handle the fugitive emissions that would result from the expansion, Eastman's engineers presented two choices: a single stack that would cost $24 million and take 800 feet to reach a dispersion rate of the chemical to 8 parts per million, or several shorter stacks at a cost of $8 million, which would take 1,200 feet to reach the lowest emission limit set by the state agency. The national health limit is 17 parts per million, says Bill Chandler, director/site services management.



Vulcan's Wichita panel on tour.

Most of the group was in favor of the cheaper alternative. "Since the difference in environmental benefits was so small, the issue of the economics became a higher priority for me. From my perspective there are an awful lot of jobs at stake," says panelist Marty Minchella, deputy supervisor for the town of Greece, where he estimates that 30,000 of the 90,000 residents work for Eastman or receive a company pension.

"I would not call these considerations a tie; they are two separate issues. But they do impact each other," says Minchella. "If Kodak went out of business, we wouldn't have to worry about the adverse effects of Kodak Park. But the area would be economically devastated," he adds. "We do have to be mindful of the tradeoffs. I think it is a responsible way to look at it, given the importance of Kodak."

A panel sponsored by Olin (Stamford, CT) at its South Charleston, WV location has taken on economic concerns as its mandate. In a survey of 432 homes surrounding the company's Kanawha Valley plant that makes chlorine products, the 16-month-old group found that main concerns were jobs and economic security. West Virginia has had the highest unemployment rate of any state for years, says community advisory panel (CAP) facilitator Robin Ollis, of the National Institute of Chemical Studies (South Charleston, WV).

TEASER. The survey also found that in a community that is host to a large number of chemical plants with homes nestled around them, Olin was one of the least known. The panel decided to raise public awareness by delivering boxes of dish detergent containing chlorinated dry bleach made at the plant to 1,200 homes, with a teaser promising to reveal the following week: "Which South Charleston industrial neighbor makes this product work." Future projects include using free broadcast time to spread safety information, setting up information booths at area events, and taking people on plant tours.

Notes Olin plant manager Mike Murray, "Environmental, health, and safety issues are not what this panel is all about at this point. There's a high inter-

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est in the environment, but unless there's a hot [environmental] issue on the table, they're more interested in the economic health and impact of the plant. how can they help to create more jobs for the area." He continues, "The valley has certainly not been in a growth mode for some time. They want to know how they can interest us in growing the business in this area."

Eastman's Chandler believes that economics as a priority is temporary. "It's a roller coaster that will rise and fall with the national situation. Look at the elections as an example. A few years from now, when jobs and economics are in place, I suspect that we will all see a strong drive for pure environmental issues. And industry has to be prepared to deal with it."

One industrial site that will be out in front when the tide turns is Dow Chemical's Plaquemine, LA complex. The panel there has been effective in advising the company on safety issues. Last year the company installed lighting at a dangerous railroad crossing in response to the panel's vigilance (*CW, Dec. 11, 1991, p. 21*). This year a panelist raised a question nobody could answer: In the event of an emergency that would require evacuation, do emergency responders know where disabled people live, and are they prepared to help them? Dow has since surveyed 2,000 homes within a two-mile radius of the plant and created a data base with the answers. The data base resides at the parish office of emergency preparedness, where it is accessible to all emergency officials. And each home that needed it has a glow-in-the-dark sticker with the letter *I* on it—the universal symbol for invalid.

LIVE FROM BATON ROUGE. The panel suggested that Dow use television in its public outreach efforts. So the company created a program called "Dow Live," which airs once every two months on the ABC affiliate in Baton Rouge and is watched by half a million people. It features 10 minutes of information about the company, followed by live questions.

On Oct. 25, Dow was asked if any jobs have been lost because of environmental projects; and there were queries on Dow hiring practices, on the pay rate of contract workers, on the local economic impact of the Dow company store, on the use of Freon and chlorofluorocarbons at the plant, and a request to make a presentation to the CAP by a group that represents injured workers.

Dow also shared Plaquemine's self-evaluations on Responsible Care with the CAP. Like the panelists at the Eastman Kodak plant, who called the evaluation process an "exercise in futility," the Dow CAP members found the self-evaluation left them wanting more and better information. Says Eastman Kodak panelist Minchella: "In explaining what Kodak was doing to achieve their rating, they gave us the information they were using. We had the same information, so we came to the same conclusion."



Minchella (left): Self-evaluations are an 'exercise in futility.'

The Dow panelists were just as blunt, says Responsible Care manager Donna Carville. "They said the public doesn't care how we evaluate ourselves." Together, panel and company decided to get a panel-picked outside evaluation of Dow Plaquemine's adherence to the community awareness emergency response (CAER) code. The outside team was headed by Larry G. Mounce, assistant hazardous materials chief of the Baton Rouge, LA fire department. Says panel member Pam Kaster, "I have the highest regard for Mounce. You could not put the clamps on him. He asked for what he wanted."

What Mounce wanted included assistance from surrounding parish hazmat experts, a look at the site, at emergency plans, training programs, visits with employees in the vinyl chloride unit, and the company's worst-case scenario in case of an accident. Says Mounce: "Without question, we were thoroughly impressed. What we want to know is how can we get other facilities to do the same things?"

Mounce also had recommendations. He suggested that local officials get training on understanding air dispersion models. And while Mounce says he got a worst-case scenario from the company, he adds, "I still don't know what will happen if there is a major chlorine leak. The company doesn't put a high priority on this because the likelihood of it happening is low. But if just one plant had such an accident and wasn't prepared, it would ruin the credibility of all of the rest."

At *CW*'s press time, Mounce and Carville were planning to present Mounce's findings to the national advisory panel, which advises on Responsible Care for the Chemical Manufacturers Association (Washington; *CW, Dec. 11, 1991, p. 24*). Mounce has written a six-page outline that he calls a proposed process "that a facility could use to provide an outside audit of their CAER code."

Kaster, who is president of Citizens for a Cleaner Environment, says, "This issue goes beyond independent audits. I would like to be able to compare my company with other companies. One method would be through a calculation like an emissions-per-job ratio."

ACHILLES HEEL. The idea for such a benchmark figure was recently proposed by environmental studies professor Paul Templet at Louisiana State University, and has met criticism from the state's chemical industry association. In response, Kaster says, "If CMA won't provide us with better information, [its members] better stop shooting down what we try to gather ourselves." Her sentiment echoes what Roger Pryor, head of the Missouri Coalition for the Environment (St. Louis) and member of CMA's national advisory panel, calls "the Achilles heel" of Responsible Care (*p. 26*).

As local panels and members like Kaster begin reaching conclusions that parallel national and industry-wide issues, sites like Plaquemine will come under increasing scrutiny. Eventually, requests for information like worst-case chemical accident scenarios may become routine. The Clean Air Act of 1990 requires companies to produce those scenarios internally by mid-decade, says Tom Demrick, president of Du Pont-Safer, a subsidiary of Du Pont that sells air toxics dispersion modeling software. In the next six months, says Demrick, his company plans to conduct a pilot project—sharing a worst-case scenario with a CAP. If it happens, it will be a national first.

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