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Health & Safety: Taking the Message to the Public

Frank Burkhardt, IBPAT research director, advocated IBPAT's involvement in health and safety issues during a KWGN-TV program aired last month in Denver.

Appearing as the guest on the station's "Right-to-Say It" program, Director Burkhardt faced questions from two interviewers, Greg Guinan, KWGN vice president and public affairs manager, and Eric Schmidt, KWGN news anchorperson. Noel Jordan, of Denver University's Mass Media Department, moderated the half-hour program.

Burkhardt supported the need for stronger health and safety standards for the nation's working men and women and advocated the importance of IBPAT's own efforts to strengthen the worker's hand through research, education and

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labor-management cooperation.

Burkhardt criticized the Government Services Administration (GSA) and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for efforts to institute cost-benefit analysis into the health and safety standard setting procedure. Nowhere in the OSHA Act is cost-benefit analysis required. Burkhardt stressed that using cost-benefit analysis to obstruct regulation of hazardous conditions and sub-

**Government Cost-Benefit Analysis:
—Putting a price tag on YOUR life?**

stances is "deciding who will live and who will die."

The methods employed by government in cost-benefit analysis were also hit hard by Burkhardt.

"They do not take into account the hidden costs," he pointed out to the interviewers and to the viewing public. "A Johns-Mansville vice president has estimated that occupational health problems are costing the United States public 35 billion dollars each year," he explained. "And \$108 billion will be spent caring for those who will die of asbestos-related diseases in the next 10 years alone," he added. "But these figures do not find their way into the cost benefit analysis of the government."

The inflationary impact of health and safety regulations that supposedly make products too expensive is also over-stated, emphasized Burkhardt, who provided examples from the paint and allied trades industry.

"The switch from lead base-paints to titanium base-paints is a prime example of a safer—and cheaper—product," he said. He also pointed out that an abrasive blaster's air-fitted hood, with an air-conditioner attached, costs about \$4.00 per day per worker, but can increase the worker's efficiency 10 to 15 percent.

Finally, Burkhardt pointed to many changes that can be made by manufacturers without additional cost when they are compelled to make safe products. Drywall taping compounds containing asbestos were considered "irreplaceable" just a few short years ago—"until we began to refuse to work with them." Then, suddenly, substitutes were found . . . and the substitutes cost no more than the asbestos-contain-

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ing product. "But, they wouldn't have done it, if they hadn't been forced to do it."

Other topics covered in the "Right-to-Say It" program were OSHA's beginning, how it got its controversial reputation and how it is working to do a better job; how IBPAT's occupational safety and health training program is providing essential information to IBPAT members and the crucial issue of

union vs. non-union health and safety cost and protection.

Burkhardt indicated that non-union workers fear job loss, which makes them less-likely to complain about health and safety issues. Consequently, most OSHA complaints about health and safety issues are against union contractors. "This puts a heavy burden on the union contractor, while the worst offender, the non-union contractor, can use inadequate worker protection as a means of cutting costs."

Burkhardt would like to see sanc-

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tions against contractors who do not provide safe and healthful working conditions and some incentive or support for those who do. He also feels that more stringent enforcement of OSHA standards in the non-union sector is long overdue both for the protection of workers and the public's pocketbook and to provide for fair competition by union contractors who are making the effort to protect their workers.

The appearance of Director Burkhardt on KWGN-TV was arranged by the IBPAT-OSH Project as part of IBPAT's continuing commitment to health and safety education.

"The public has a right to know," maintains Burkhardt.

"We can't have effective health and safety laws enacted and enforced without the support of the public," reminds General President S. Frank Raftery. "The public must be informed, along with our members, about the costs and consequences of unsafe and unhealthy work conditions."

"KWGN is to be commended for their foresight and fairness in making this show possible," concludes General President Raftery. "They have shown a high regard for a fair and fair airing of all opinions."

IBPAT expects to participate in similar programs on television and radio throughout the country in coming months.

Copies of the KWGN program will be available on 34-inch video tape. For more information contact IBPAT Research Department; 1750 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20006.

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