

PR WATCH

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COVERING THE EARTH WITH "GREEN PR"

by Joel Bleifuss

As the 25th anniversary of Earth Day dawns, the public relations industry is quietly advising its corporate clients to keep from gloating.

The February 1995 *O'Dwyer's PR Services* reports that the recent Republican electoral victory means "Relief is on the way for PR clients on the environmental front. . . . Green PR people are advised to ride the Republican fueled anti-environmental backlash wave as far as possible. But they should not be greedy because overreaching may come back to haunt them once the sun sets on the pro-business Republicans and greenies are again on the rise."

In the perverse world of public relations, lobbying *against* environmental regulations is known as "environmental" or "green" PR. "Environmental PR people enjoy sweet dreams these days as visions of Newt Gingrich and his Republican cohorts chopping away at 'bur-

FLACK ATTACK

There is an old poster which shows a rag doll being squeezed through a wringer. The caption reads, "The truth will set you free . . . but first it will make you miserable."

That's how you may feel after reading Joel Bleifuss's articles for this issue of *PR Watch*.

Twenty-five years ago, millions of Americans launched the green movement with the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970. Today, however, it is *anti-environmentalism* that is on the rise and gaining power.

How did this happen? To answer that question, Bleifuss pored over our voluminous files on "green PR" and its role in creating an *anti-environmental* backlash.

In addition to Bleifuss' reporting, two excellent books have come out recently, providing important insights and analyses of environmentalism's shortcomings.

Mark Dowie's *Losing Ground: American Environmentalism at the Close of the 20th Century* (MIT Press), offers a critique of the environmental movement by a committed green journalist. It argues that much of the movement's failure is due to elite environmental

bureaucrats in NY or DC office suites, who have effectively disempowered their own grassroots supporters in exchange for a veneer of "professionalism." Big environmental groups like the Environmental Defense Fund and National Wildlife Federation have bought access, but obviously not power, in the nation's capital.

David Helvarg's *The War Against The Greens* (Sierra Club Books) tells the story of the right-wing "Wise Use" movement, whose tactics against eco-activists have included "arson, bombings, rape, assault, and attempted murder."

This issue of *PR Watch* shows the links between the themes of these two books. We document the "good cop, bad cop" strategy through which the PR industry has courted and co-opted environmentalists, while simultaneously orchestrating extremist attacks.

Until environmental activists recognize the PR strategies behind the war that is being waged against them, they will continue to find themselves outmaneuvered and (literally) out-gunned.

—John C. Stauber, Editor

densome' green regulations dance in their heads. . . . Green PR pros are salivating at the chance to prove their worth to clients. They are ready to navigate the thicket of regulations in DC, select those most annoying to clients, and convince lawmakers to dump them."

Michael Kehs, who heads Burson-Marsteller PR's worldwide environmental practice, offers this advice to *O'Dwyer's* readers: "Don't get your hopes up and don't appear greedy by complaining how much compliance with green laws costs . . . Don't overreach or else things may backfire. . . . That could jeopardize years of good works and careful corporate positioning."

"Don't get your hopes up and don't appear greedy by complaining how much compliance with green laws costs. . . . Don't overreach or else things may backfire."

President Clinton's election in 1992 seemed to usher in a period of rising influence for the environmental movement. "Today, however," reports Kehs, "the business community enjoys the upper hand. . . . There is a new contract on the street. And although the word 'environment' is never mentioned, many observers believe it's less a contract with America than a 'contract on environmental busybodies.' . . . There is no better time to extend an olive branch."

PLUMBING THE PUBLIC MIND

Public relations begins with state-of-the-art opinion polling. The PR industry's desire to pacify the environmental movement reflects its well-researched and deep understanding of public opinion in the United States.

Polls indicate that the vast majority of people today believe that human actions are damaging the natural environment they live in. Market researchers say that somewhere between 75 percent to 95 percent of US citizens consider themselves to be "green." More than 20 million "green" Americans translate these concerns into contributions of time and money to environmental organizations.

These opinions contrast strongly with the consensus opinion among business executives. According to one leading PR firm, 99.9 (!) percent of business executives agree with the statement: "Overall, the quality of the environment in your country is improving."

Even though business leaders are a minority whose opinions run contrary to the mainstream of American thought, they are able to determine government policy thanks to a carefully-planned, long-term strategy of

Edelman's top-notch professionals have given S.C. Johnson's environmental programs value-added creativity, strategic thinking and results for success.

See *Adweek*, *Journal of Environmental Affairs* for U.S. Consumer Products, S.C. Johnson & Son, Inc.

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Until last year, Edelman PR Worldwide represented Calvert, the "socially responsible" investment company. Calvert admitted discomfort at being listed as an Edelman client along with some of the world's most socially irresponsible clients, including tobacco dealer Phillip Morris, the government of Mexico, and agrichemical giant Monsanto—for which Edelman organized a coalition to oppose consumer labeling of genetically-engineered foods. Edelman also played a role in sabotaging author David Steinman's book about pesticides in foods.

"divide and conquer" which skillfully exploits divisions, such as those between "moderates" and "radicals" within the environmental movement.

Bruce Harrison, one of the leading practitioners in the field of environmental PR, says "top management" realizes that the vast majority of green Americans are "disconnected" from environmental reality. But communications specialists can now "quantify the sources of misperceptions that need to be addressed."

The anti-environmental campaign is most obvious in the fringe activities of radical right-wing organizations calling themselves the "Wise Use" movement. Supported by corporate sponsors, Wise Use is loudly agitating against laws and regulations that constrain the exploitation of natural resources. But quietly, far from the roar of anti-environmental extremists, environmen-

tal PR specialists are waging a quieter, more insidious war on the environment.

In 1990 alone, US businesses spent an estimated \$500 million on hiring the services of anti-environmental PR professionals and on "greenwashing" their corporate image. *O'Dwyers* termed the environmental struggle, "the life and death PR battle of the 1990s."

The object of this PR war is to change public perceptions about both the environment and its despoilers. PR battles are being waged on many fronts, on television, in the printed press, in grade school classrooms, in community meeting halls, on the board of directors of mainstream environmental groups, at journalism conferences, and on talk radio.

SOFTENING UP THE CENTER

This strategy explains why many of the same companies that are funding the *anti*-environmental movement are also pouring money into mainstream environmental groups. Joe Lyford, Jr. reports in *Propaganda Review* that corporate sponsors of the World Wildlife Fund, Nature Conservancy, Defenders of Wildlife, Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Defense Fund, Audubon Society and National Wildlife Federation also funded about one-quarter of the 37 organizations described in the *Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations*.

Frank Boren, former president of the Nature Conservancy and a board member of ARCO Petroleum, defends corporate cooperative efforts with environmental organizations. As he told his colleagues, "One good

thing about that is that while we're working with them, they don't have time to sue us."

Corporate collaborations with environmental groups provide another benefit to corporate PR professionals: the opportunity to glean valuable knowledge from green critics of the companies they represent.

"Companies must have some vehicle for knowing what the intelligent public thinks about their products and processes," says Joanna Underwood, president of the New York-based INFORM, an environmental research organization. "If they want to understand sophisticated outside views of environmental issues affecting their companies, they would do well to have someone in the room."

"Conservationists have just got to learn to work with industry," said the Audubon Society's Don Naish, explaining his decision to approve oil drilling by Mobil under an Audubon bird sanctuary in Michigan.

Last year, academic business researchers intensely studied the thought processes of 34 people from 21 environmental organizations and 37 environmental managers from 19 corporations. The environmentalists participating in this study came from the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Audubon Society, Environmental Defense Fund, Sierra Club and Greenpeace. Corporate partici-

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pants included environmental managers from Waste Management, Browning Ferris, ARCO, Mobil, Chevron and 3M.

Based on this study, published in the *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, the researchers concluded, "Whether an environmental group is confrontive or cooperative toward business depends in large part on how radical its philosophy is toward saving the earth. . . . Corporations are more likely to work with environmental groups who are more conservative. . . . and are willing to cooperate with business."

GOING GREEN WITH McDONALDS

As an example of successful cooperation between business and environmentalists, the press often mentions the partnership between McDonalds restaurants and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

In the midst of a national campaign against McDonalds organized by the grassroots Citizens Clearinghouse on Hazardous Waste, EDF President Fred Krupp barged in and negotiated a settlement. McDonalds agreed to switch from using styrofoam to coated paper in its US restaurants. Krupp gained a victory which the EDF highlights prominently in its fundraising.

EDF's mission, Krupp said, is not to attack corporations but "to get environmental results." He told the *New York Times*, "Being willing to consider new ways to regulate and being willing to talk with business in a businesslike way is not the same as being in favor of halfway compromises."

The main beneficiary of the agreement, however, has been McDonalds, which saw its environmental reputation soar. According to the 1994 Roper Green Gauge Study, an annual consumer opinion poll, McDonalds now has one of the highest environmental ratings of any US corporation.

Meanwhile, McDonalds remains a massive corporate polluter. The company is currently involved in a lawsuit against grassroots activists in England, who have called 180 witnesses to testify about the effects of McDonalds' operating practices and food products on the environment, on millions of farm animals, on human health, on the Third World, and on McDonalds staff.

Mark Dowie, the author of *Losing Ground*, says the EDF-McDonalds arrangement is an example of "high-level capitulations" that "unfortunately allow companies such as McDonalds to look a lot greener than they are. The corporate exploitation of 'win/win' compromising has been relentless, with company after company competing through paid and free media to out-green one another. Such activity on the corporate food chain is both predictable and understandable. But

THE PR INDUSTRY'S TOP 15 GREENWASHERS

The following table lists the 1993 net fee income, for environmental PR alone, of the top 15 public relations firms engaged in "green PR."

1	Burson-Marsteller	\$ 17,959,000
2	Ketchum PR	15,300,000
3	Hill & Knowlton*	10,000,000
4	Fleishman-Hillard	9,125,000
5	Shandwick	6,689,000
6	E. Bruce Harrison Co.	6,550,991
7	Edelman PR Worldwide	5,501,677
8	The Rowland Co.	5,000,000
9	Pacific/West Comms.	4,869,481
10	Ruder Finn	3,000,000
11	Ogilvy Adams & Rinehart	2,800,000
12	Manning, Selvage & Lee	1,196,000
13	Cerrell Assocs.	872,858
14	MWW/Strategic Comms.	748,391
15	Porter/Novelli (Omnicom)	406,000
	TOTAL:	\$90,018,398

Source: 1994 O'Dwyer's Directory of PR Firms

*Based on interview with Hill & Knowlton

environmental complicity, and its own public relations-driven tendency to turn compromise into false triumph, illustrates the impending moral bankruptcy of many mainstream organizations."

Keith Schneider, the environmental reporter for the *New York Times*, has won loud praise from PR firms for his reports criticizing the environmental movement. Schneider sees EDF—"one of the few national groups whose membership and budget is growing"—as a role model that other environmental groups should imitate. Schneider says less pliant groups, such as Greenpeace, "are in danger of becoming the green equivalent of the military lobby, more interested in sowing fear and protecting wasteful programs than in devising a new course."

Audubon's Don Naish seems to agree. "Conservationists have just got to learn to work with industry," Naish said, explaining his decision to approve oil drilling by Mobil under an Audubon bird sanctuary in Michigan.

BAD GUYS IN WHITE HATS

Some of the industrial polluters with the worst records have devised PR public education campaigns that enable the company to placate the public while they continue polluting.

The agri-chemical conglomerate Monsanto was one of the early pioneers of greenwashing, following the 1962

publication of *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson's classic indictment of the pesticide industry. Monsanto responded by publishing *The Desolate Year*, a parody in which the failure to use pesticides causes a plague of insect pests to devastate America. About 5,000 copies were sent out to book reviewers, science and gardening writers, magazine editors and farm journalists. The argument was picked up by *New York Times* reporter Walter Sullivan, who wrote, "By stating her case so one-sidedly, Rachel Carson forfeits persuasiveness. . . . She also lays herself open to parody. Some unsung hero of the chemical industry has written for Monsanto magazine an article entitled, *The Desolate Year*."

Monsanto is currently positioning itself to defend its toxic products with a public relations campaign centered on the herbicide Round-Up™. The company has given away hundreds of gallons of Round-Up through "Spontaneous Weed Attack Teams" (SWAT) to community groups for spraying in inner-city neighborhoods to make them "cleaner and safer places to live." Monsanto's PR also touts Round-Up as a boon to endangered species, pointing out that the pesticide "is used in Kenya, Africa, to keep grasses from short circuiting electric fences that protect the endangered black rhino."

Dow Chemicals is one of the 10 US firms with the best environmental reputations, but fish caught downstream from Dow's home base in Michigan remain inedible.

Dow Chemical's environmental PR campaign began in 1984 with the goal of making "Dow a more highly regarded company among the people who can influence its future." Dow's reputation was still suffering from its manufacture of napalm bombs and Agent Orange defoliants that devastated much of Vietnam. The company mailed glossy "Public Interest Reports" to 60,000 opinion makers: scientists, the media, legislators, regulators, employers, customers and academics. Illustrated with numerous high-quality photographs, the "Public Interest Reports" touted Dow's programs in the area of environment and five other "good works" categories.

This campaign paid off, according to a 1986 media survey showing a 60.5 percent gain in favorable media opinion. That same year, a poll by the *Washington Journalism Review* found that business editors rated Dow's PR efforts tops among Fortune 500 chemical companies.

More recently Dow, as a member of the Chemical Manufacturers Association, has participated in Respon-

sible Care, a program where each chemical company evaluates its own environmental performance. Dow also issues annual environmental reports that highlight the steps the company has made in improving its environmental performance. Dow's advertising slogan reinforces the same message: "Dow helps you do great things."

As a result of this systematic campaign, *American Demographics* listed Dow in 1993 as one of the 10 US firms with the best environmental reputations among consumers.

"Many people use [Dow] as an example of doing the right thing. There is hardly a discussion of pollution control and prevention among American industries that fails to highlight Dow and the strides it has made," writes Jenni Laidman in the *Bay City Times* of Saginaw, MI. Laidman notes that Dow garners all this praise even though the company "is still a leading polluter in the state and the nation. . . . fish caught downstream from Midland [Dow's home base in Michigan] remain inedible, according to state fish advisories."

Sometimes a change of name is all it takes to improve a company's image. Waste Management, the nation's largest waste disposal company, has paid an estimated \$45 million since 1980 for admitted and alleged violations of environmental laws. Recently the company changed its name to WMX, Inc., and began advertising itself as a provider of "environmental services."

DEFORMED CONSENT

In addition to co-opting environmental "moderates," the corporate PR firms are helping companies set up "community advisory panels" (CAPs) to strengthen their image in the towns and neighborhoods that host industrial facilities.

"I would give it three years and you'll see [CAPs] all around. They will be an integral part of doing business in all major industries," says A.J. Grant, president of Environmental Communication Associates in Boulder Colorado, "You've got to have a marketing department, you've got to have accounting, and you'll have to have community interaction in the form of a CAP."

According to Joel Makower, the editor of *The Green Business Letter*, CAPs "differ in makeup, style, and function," but "a typical CAP consists of 12 to 15 people, including activists, homemakers, community leaders—a representative sampling of just plain folks—as well as company representatives."

CAPs create a forum for dialogue between the company and the community, but the nature of the dialogue is carefully modulated to emphasize emotions and image-shaping rather than issues of substance. "People

in a community are usually more concerned about such issues as trust, credibility, competence, fairness, caring and compassion than about mortality statistics and the details of quantitative risk assessment," explains the PR firm Edward Howard and Co.

Dow Chemical is one of the companies that has pioneered in the establishment of CAPs. As an example of the strategy's effectiveness, Makower relates the following anecdote: "Members of one CAP, unbeknownst to the company, appeared voluntarily before a local hearing to testify why the company should be allowed to site an incinerator in their backyard. You can't buy that kind of help at any price."

"Pro-industry citizen activist groups can do things the industry can't," explained Ron Arnold, the father of the anti-environmentalist "Wise Use" movement. In a candid talk to the Ontario Forest Industries Association, Arnold elaborated on the benefits of a citizen front group strategy: "It can form coalitions to build real political clout. It can be an effective and convincing advocate for your industry. It can evoke powerful archetypes such as the sanctity of the family, the virtue of the close-knit community, the natural wisdom of the rural dweller, and many others I'm sure you can think of. It can use the tactic of the intelligent attack against environmentalists and take the battle to them instead of forever responding to environmentalist initiatives. And it can turn the public against your enemies."

The *Washington Post* reported that even 10 years ago, Burson-Marsteller's DC office alone had five PR specialists concentrating only on designing coalitions for clients. As one Burson-Marsteller executive explained it, these coalition designers "are building allies and neutralizing the opposition."

James Lindheim, Burson-Marsteller's director of worldwide public affairs, puts it this way: "Don't forget that the chemical industry has many friends and allies that can be mobilized . . . employees, shareholders, and retirees. Give them the songsheets and let them help industry carry the tune."

Sometimes the public catches on. A group called "Citizens to Protect the Pacific Northwest and Northern California Economy" was formed in 1993 by timber company executives, who mailed out 1.5 million form letters asking people to send back a signature card if they agreed with the group's goals. State leaders were then appointed.

When asked what he was going to do, the group's Washington state co-chair replied: "I haven't been brought up to date on what their agenda is going to be." A *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* editorial put it this way: "To



Portrait of an environmentalist, as drawn by the PR industry. (Reprinted from *Chain Reaction* #72.)

hire a press agent to cook up a campaign, pay all that campaign's bills and then claim that the campaign 'was founded by more than 100 prominent community leaders in Oregon, Washington, and Northern California' is too crafty by half."

SHIFTING THE BLAME: FROM POLITICAL TO PERSONAL

If corporations are not despoiling our natural environment, then who is to blame? According to corporate-sponsored PR campaigns, the answer is obvious. *You* are.

Elizabeth Whelan of the industry-funded American Council on Science and Health (see story on page 11) says the real threats to public health are lack of seatbelts, smoke detectors, drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes. "Every one of them could be prevented with a change in lifestyle," she says.

Gregg Easterbrook, the *Newsweek* journalist who has made a name for himself as an apologist for polluting industry, has also concluded that the acts of individuals are the root of many environmental problems. He wrote in the *New York Times* magazine, "Though environmental orthodoxy holds that third world deforestation is caused by rapacious clear-cutters and ruthless cattle barons, penniless peasants seeking fuel wood may be the greatest threat to our forests."

In the US, the Keep America Beautiful campaign (KAB) is industry's most organized proponent of the belief that individual irresponsibility is at the root of pollution. About 200 companies, including McDonalds, fund KAB to the tune of \$2 million a year. Members of the KAB board of directors include a PR honcho from Burson-Marsteller and a corporate official from Waste Management.

According to the *Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations*, most of the companies that support KAB "manufacture and distribute aluminum cans, paper products, glass bottles and plastics that account for about a third of the material in US landfills." KAB's message to consumers is that they are responsible for this trash, and that they must solve this problem by changing their habits.

Since the early 1970s, Greenpeace reports, KAB has used more than half a billion dollars worth of donated advertising time and space to encourage guilty consumers to "put litter in its place." (Of course, since the responsibility for litter rests with individuals, KAB strongly *opposes* a national bottle bill that would place a deposit on glass and metal drink containers.)

In effect, KAB is a front group for industries that refuse to be responsible for the trash they generate in the course of doing business.

TAKING OFF THE KID GLOVES

When "nice guy" tactics like co-optation and community advisory panels fail to accomplish their goals, corporations remain prepared to wage war on their environmental critics, using slanders, falsified information, lawsuits and threats of violence.

According to Rush Limbaugh, "the new home of the communist/socialist conspiracy is in the environmental movement." To discredit environmentalists, Hill and Knowlton PR distributed a phony memo on Earth First letterhead, calling for acts of violence "to fuck up the mega machine."

And Kathleen Marquardt of Putting People First, a Wise Use group that does not list its sources of funding, repeats Lyndon LaRouche's invented assertion that Greenpeace is connected to the KGB. Marquardt was awarded "best newcomer" at the 1992 Wise Use Leadership Conference. Upon accepting her award, Marquardt said: "Here is our enemy—the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, the Humane Society." According to Marquardt, the Humane Society is a "radical animal rights cult . . . a front for a neo-pagan cult that is attacking science, health and reason."

The Wise Use movement is the brainchild of Alan Gottlieb and Ron Arnold, respectively the founder and the director of the Bellevue, WA-based Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise. The *Greenpeace Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations* describes the center, founded in 1983, as "the premier think tank and training center for the Wise Use movement."

The founding funders of the Center include the timber firms Georgia Pacific, Louisiana-Pacific, Boise

Cascade, Pacific Lumber and MacMillan Bloedel, along with companies like Exxon and Dupont.

The Wise Use agenda is simple. Says Arnold, "We intend to wipe out every environmental group, by replacing it with a Wise Use group."

The public relations industry has been closely involved with Wise Use since its founding, according to Joyce Nelson, the author of *Sultans of Sleaze: Public Relations and the Media* (Common Courage Press). Nelson writes that 36 of the corporations that are known to fund the Wise Use movement in the United States were clients of the PR firm Burson-Marsteller in the 1980s, the period during which industry began to pour money into that movement.

"We intend to wipe out every environmental group, by replacing it with a Wise Use group."

The first Wise Use conference, held in 1988, was supported by a variety of special interests including Exxon and the National Rifle Association. The 1990 conference, funded by Chevron, Exxon, Shell Oil and Georgia Pacific, featured a talk by Reed Irvine, of Accuracy in Media and Accuracy in Academia. Titled "Red Into Green," Irvine's talk claimed that environmentalism is the latest incarnation of socialism. Irvine's groups are funded by Dresser Industries, Chevron, Ciba-Geigy, Exxon, IBM, Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical, Union Carbide, Phillips Petroleum, Mobil Foundation, Texaco Philanthropic Foundation, among others.

Also at that conference, the Mountain States Legal Foundation gave three seminars on "Suing Environmental Organizations." Mountain States Legal Foundation is funded by companies including Amoco, Exxon, Ford, Texaco, Phillips Petroleum, Chevron and the Coors Foundation.

"Our intent is to sue environmental groups whenever there is a legal reason to do so," Arnold said. "We feel that whenever any environmental group tells lies that have an economic harm against anybody, that is a civil tort, and under US law they should be vigorously prosecuted in civil court."

And if lawsuits fail, some anti-environmentalists urge even stronger tactics. Former Interior Secretary James Watt (currently under federal criminal indictment on corruption charges) told a gathering of cattlemen in June 1990, "If the troubles from environmentalists cannot be solved in the jury box or at the ballot box, perhaps the cartridge box should be used." ■

JOURNALIST, WATCH THYSELF: KEEPING TABS ON THE MESSENGERS

by Joel Bleifuss

Environmental reporters, beware. You're being followed.

Journalism is sometimes described as a "watchdog" profession, which serves the public by finding and reporting on abuses of power. But the PR industry has put environmental reporters under closer scrutiny than the corporate polluters whose behavior the "watchdogs" are supposed to be monitoring.

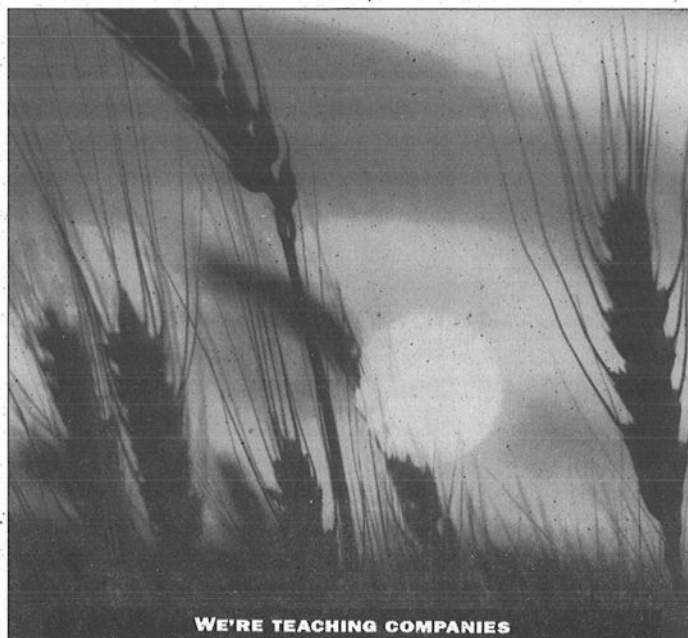
Former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Dean Rotbart has carved a niche for himself within the PR industry by compiling dossiers on his former colleagues. Rotbart gives paid lectures and workshops to help PR professionals know "what a journalist is thinking." Rotbart explains; "One of the services we provide is taking biographies of reporters from all over the country—something like 6,000 bios—in our computer system, and if at any point you get a call from a journalist and don't know who it is, call up and we will fax you that bio within an hour."

These bios are a regular feature in a new Rotbart publication, the *TJFR Environmental News Reporter*. Promotional literature boasts that this \$395-a-year PR resource is "tailored to serve the needs of communications professionals who deal with environmental issues. . . . Let us be your eyes and ears when the environmental media convene. . . . Gather vital information on key journalists . . . Who's the boss? . . . Age and Tenure . . . How do you break the ice? . . . Not only will you find news on journalists, we'll tell you what they want from you and what strategies you can employ with them to generate more positive stories and better manage potentially negative situations."

"Let us be your eyes and ears when the environmental media convene. . . . Gather vital information on key journalists."

The premier issue of Rotbart's newsletter includes a long piece on CNN's Environment Unit, with biographies of all its top staff. It explains, for example, that Peter Dykstra worked for Greenpeace for 11 years and attended Boston University's College of Communications. The issue also contains an interview with Emilia Askari of the *Detroit Free Press*. The accompanying bio explains that Askari is president of the Society of Environmental Journalists and "enjoys all kinds of outdoor activities and tutors illiterate adults with Literacy Volunteers of America."

In addition to this information, the bio tells PR managers whom to contact if they want to complain about



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KETCHUM PUBLIC RELATIONS

Ketchum PR claims to have handled "all aspects of environmental PR, from toxic waste to low-level nuclear wastes, from community relations at Superfund sites to scientific meetings where issues like toxicology of pesticides are reviewed." The amber waves of grain in this ad make an ironic contrast to Ketchum's use of smear campaigns, paid "scientific" front groups, and libel threats to intimidate environmentalists.

something that Askari writes: "Chain of command: Reports to Bob Campbell, assistant city editor."

STUDYING THE ENEMY

Wherever environmental journalists gather, flacks are not far away. *Environment Writer*, an industry-funded publication of the National Safety Council, reported on the November 1994 fourth annual conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists. In addition to journalists, the 428 conference registrants included 50 self-identified environmental PR experts, representing organizations such as Dow Chemical, American Forest and Paper Association, Global Climate Coalition, Chlorine Industrial Council and Chemical Manufacturers Association. "I was engulfed in a sea of flacks," commented one member of the press.

The February 1995 issue of *Environment Writer* reports on another PR effort to get inside the heads of journalists—laboratory research using 12 real journalists as paid guinea pigs to help develop a PR strategy for DuPont pesticides.

DuPont flacks recruited participants by sending an invitation to “selected members of the media,” which promised: “This learning endeavor will be used to help DuPont establish new policies regarding pesticides: their use and information important to consumers, the government, farmers and the press. . . . Your ethics as a journalist (and that of your news organization) will not be violated or jeopardized in any way. . . . The goal is to make better pesticide policies.”

Journalists were paid \$250 apiece to write essays on themes such as “DuPont makes very wonderful chemicals, and no one needs to worry,” while DuPont researchers watched behind a mirrored window.

One participant who asked not to be named said, “They would give us small pieces of paper which would say something like, ‘DuPont makes very wonderful chemicals, and no one needs to worry.’” Journalists were then told to develop a storyline based on the information on the slip of paper, while DuPont researchers observed from behind a mirrored window. When their work was done the reporters were handed envelopes that contained \$250 cash.

“I came out of there and I felt really disgusted that I had to earn money in this kind of way,” said one journalist who participated in the study.

ALL THE WORLD’S A STAGED OIL SPILL

To help ARCO Petroleum practice its PR plan for handling the news media following environmental disasters, Dashka Slater and two other journalists were hired by Robert J. Meyers and Associates, a Houston-based consulting firm. She related her experience in *Sierra Magazine*.

In a staged run-through of an oil spill, Slater and the other reporters were assigned to play the part of the “predatory press.” Professional actors were brought in to play the part of environmentalists. ARCO employees and government officials played themselves. “The drills give company flacks the opportunity to practice varnishing the truth just in case the mop-up doesn’t go as planned,” wrote Slater. “Mostly the company and gov-

ernment spokespeople did what they had learned to do in numerous media-training workshops: convey as little information as possible in as many words as possible.” In the past 6 years Meyers and Associates have conducted more than 400 such drills.

In the real world, however, reporters are often less confrontational and are even eager collaborators in corporate public relations efforts. The Health Industry Manufacturers Association, whose products must be approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), provided much of the background information for an ABC news special attacking the FDA titled “Is the Government Protecting Us to Death?”

The 1990 convention of the Public Relations Society of America featured a speech by William Small, former president of NBC News and United Press International. Small told the gathered flacks that the Exxon Valdez oil spill—the most notorious man-made environmental disaster in US history—was first and foremost a PR problem:

“I won’t ask how many of you are environmentalists,” Small said. “We are not here today to debate environmental or ethical questions. We are, at least for today, not concerned with the fate of sea otters, but with how a huge American corporation spent \$2 billion on the cleanup of what was not the worst oil spill ever, yet lost the battle of public relations.”

SENDING THE PAPER TO BED

In Canada, Burson-Marsteller, the world’s largest PR firm, created a front group in 1990 called the “BC Forest Alliance” to advance the interest of one of its clients, the British Columbia forestry industry. The BC Forest Alliance’s first executive director was Burson-Marsteller employee Gary Ley.

This PR effort became easier in 1991 when Burson-Marsteller picked up another client in British Columbia—the *Vancouver Sun*. “My personal experience in trying to cut through Burson-Marsteller was not greeted with favor by the paper,” says Ken Parfitt, the *Sun*’s forestry reporter.

Parfitt sold an article to *The Georgia Straight* that discussed Burson-Marsteller’s past history, such as the company’s PR work to clean up Argentina’s international image at a time when the Argentine military and police were murdering thousands of political dissidents. Parfitt also reported that Ken Rietz, a senior Burson-Marsteller employee and Forest Alliance consultant, was a key Watergate conspirator.

Following the publication of Parfitt’s article, the *Sun* pulled him from the forest beat.

GREEN ISSUES ARE RARELY BLACK AND WHITE.

In a perfect world, all environmental issues would be clear cut. Either you're green or you're not. Period. But nothing is that simple. Take recyclable packaging. Is it made from recycled materials or can the package be recycled? And what about source reduction? Is it *better* than recycling?

Confused? Welcome to the real world of environmental issues. As you can see, clearly communicating such grey issues is *key*. At Kaufman Public Relations, we find just the right balance.

If you'd like to find out how to best present your environmental message, call Allen Carrier at (202) 333-0700.

KAUFMAN
PUBLIC RELATIONS
A Shandrick Company

Kaufman PR's \$1 million account with the National Dairy Board was cancelled after a Freedom of Information Act investigation revealed that Kaufman had hired infiltrators to pose as housewives at a January 1990 New York city conference organized by activist dairy farmers. The spying was part of Kaufman's "crisis management" plan to undermine opposition to bovine growth hormone (BGH), a controversial genetically-engineered product now being injected in cows to increase milk production.

Before Burson-Marsteller went to work for the *Sun*, the paper employed five full-time reporters to cover forestry, fisheries, native affairs, energy and mines, and environment. Today only the environment position remains, and the reporter on that beat has been instructed to cover environmental issues in Greater Vancouver and the lower mainland, an area which is conveniently distant from the Clayoquot Sound, where Burson-Marsteller is helping fell one of the last large areas of intact coastal temperate rainforest in the world.

The Canadian Pulp and Paper Association is also working with the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and Knight Ridder to join forces with the forest products industry to blunt environmental protests against forestry practices in the US and Canada. MacMillan Bloedel, one of the timber companies that is cutting down the Clayoquot Sound, supplies paper to many publications, including the *New York Times*. MacMillan also advertises in the pages of *Editor and Publisher* about the greenness of its forestry operations.

PUNISHING THE MESSENGERS

Sometimes PR firms take more aggressive action against members of the press who criticize corporate environmental practices. David Steinman, author of *Diet for a Poisoned Planet*, became the object of a smear campaign orchestrated by Ketchum PR to suppress his book's information about chemically-contaminated foods (*PR Watch* volume 1, #5). "They went after me personally because there was no way to discredit my data," says Steinman. "They sent out personally defam-

atory materials to talk shows that had scheduled me for upcoming shows, many of which cancelled after receiving materials from Ketchum."

Such attacks seem to be part of Ketchum Communication's standard operating strategy: accusations that writers like Steinman are engaged in "environmental terrorism" (because their books scare people); calls for journalists to be "more responsible and less irrational"; and suing for "slander" to intimidate reporters into silence.

Lawsuits against writers who question a company's environmental practices are as old as *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson's environmental classic of the early 1960s. Veliscol Chemical Company, the maker of DDT, filed suit against Houghton Mifflin, Carson's publisher, claiming her book left "the false impression that all business is grasping and immoral."

Currently, Peter Montague, editor of *Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly*, is being sued for slander in St. Louis by a former Monsanto scientist because Montague quoted an EPA report critical of the scientist's methods. ■

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SCIENCE IN THE PRIVATE INTEREST: HIRING FLACKS TO ATTACK THE FACTS

by Joel Bleifuss

To counteract scientific documentation of corporate environmental destruction, the PR industry has mastered the art of using "third party" scientists hired to argue that a company's product is harmless.

The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), a commonly-used industry front group, produces PR ammunition for the food processing and chemical industries. It is a client of Ketchum PR. Headed by Elizabeth Whelan, ACSH routinely represents itself as an "independent," "objective" science institute.

Howard Kurtz of the *Washington Post* dissected Whelan's propaganda machine—and the special interests which fund it—in the March, 1990 *Columbia Journalism Review*. He reported that Whelan praises the nutritional virtues of fast food and receives money from Burger King. She downplays the link between a high fat diet and heart disease, while receiving funding from Oscar Mayer, Frito Lay and Land O'Lakes. She defends saccharin and receives money from Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, NutraSweet and the National Soft Drink Association.

Whelan attacks a Nebraska businessman's crusade against fatty tropical oils—the unhealthy oils in movie popcorn—while she is in the pay of palm oil special interests including Hill and Knowlton, the PR firm representing the Malaysian palm oil industry. "There has never been a case of ill health linked to the regulated, approved use of pesticides in this country," she claims while taking money from a host of pesticide makers.

And Whelan speaks harshly of mainstream environmentalists, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council. Speaking to the *Bangor Daily News*, Whelan described the NRDC as an "ideologically fueled project" whose "target is the free-enterprise, corporate America system. I think they hate the word 'profit' and they'll do anything that will involve corporate confrontation."

Whelan defends her "scientific" views by saying that her findings have have undergone "peer review" by experts among the scientists affiliated with her group.

But Michael Jacobson of the Center for Science in the Public Interest dismisses the bona fides of such "peer review" scientists: "They don't exactly publish [their findings] in leading scientific journals. They publish pamphlets that are reviewed by their professional cronies of the regulated industries. It's science that's forced through a sieve of conservative philosophy."

HOOK, LINE AND SINKER

The PR industry realized long ago that journalists rarely check the background of their sources, so Whelan and the American Council on Science and Health are often quoted in the news as "scientific experts." For example, in a show hosted by Walter Cronkite titled "Big

Fears, Little Risks," Cronkite introduced Whelan as one of "a growing number of scientists who fear that overstating the risk of environmental chemicals is actually threatening the health of Americans."

In *Fortune* magazine, Whelan appeared as the source in a story by Ann Reilly Dowd which stated, "A big part of the problem is that America's environmental policy making has increasingly been driven more by media hype and partisan politics than by sensible science. . . . Despite the waves of panic that roll over America each year, some 500 scientists surveyed by the American Council on Science and Health have concluded that the threat to life from environmental hazards is negligible."

Neither Cronkite nor Dowd explained that the ACSH is an industry front group. Kurtz observes, "Journalists who blindly quote 'experts' without illuminating their agenda are simply adding another layer of fog to an already confusing debate."

Rhyus Roth, of the Northwest Atmosphere Protection Coalition, continually goes up against industry "science" as he tries to raise public concern about the greenhouse effect and ozone depletion. Roth says scientists like Whelan—who speaks of the "allegedly depleting ozone layer"—are "atmosphere confusionists."

"How do the confusionists achieve their goal?" Roth asks. "By simply sowing enough confusion in the minds of Americans about the science behind the greenhouse effect to defuse our collective concern and outrage, rendering us politically mute."

Industry-funded experts use the contrast between their claims and the claims of the scientific community to argue that the "jury is still out" and that "further research is necessary" before taking any action.

And according to corporate apologist Cynthia Crossen, the jury is likely to *remain* out for a very, very long time. "With each passing year, it seems less likely that research will ever tell the truth about food and human health," states Crossen's book, *The Manipulation of Fact in America*.

THE TRUTH ABOUT TUMORS

Industry experts habitually distort statistics to obscure the rising rate of cancer in industrialized nations.

"We also know there is no cancer epidemic," claims Elizabeth Whelan. "Most cancer rates have been constant for decades. (A major exception is lung cancer because of cigarette smoking.) What a marvelous time to live, and to be born! We are giving ourselves and our children the gift of better and longer lives."

The late Dixie Lee Ray, the former governor of Washington and the former head of the Atomic Energy Commission, made the same claim before her death: "A

proper look at cancer statistics shows that, aside from a sharp increase in lung cancer caused by cigarette smoking, there have been no significant increases in the rate at which people die from any of the common forms of cancer over the past 50 years."

This claim was repeated by journalist David Shaw of the *Los Angeles Times* last September in a series of articles examining environmental health risks. Shaw took his information from an "expert" at Resources for the Future (RFF), a pro-industry group that he described as "a Washington think tank that specializes in environmental issues." Shaw quoted RFF vice president Paul Portney: "If everything is as harmful as we're told, how come we're healthier and living longer . . . than ever before?"

Shaw also turned to the National Cancer Institute, a government agency with close ties to the chemical and pharmaceutical industry. According to the Institute, "the age adjusted mortality rate for all cancers combined except lung cancer has been declining since 1950, except for those 85 and over."

These statistics, however, paint a misleading picture. Research by Samuel Epstein at the University of Illinois School of Public Health, published in the *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, shows that the incidence of all types of cancer, excluding lung cancer, rose by 29.1 percent during the period from 1950 to 1988.

Contrary to the National Cancer Institute's claims, the British medical journal *Lancet* reported in 1990 that the death rate from brain and other central nervous system cancers, breast cancer, multiple myeloma, kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, and melanoma has been increasing over the past 20 years in persons age 55 and older in the US and five other industrialized nations.

Improved medical care, *not* a decline in cancer rates, has kept cancer mortality rates from jumping dramatically. "The extent to which mortality rates can obscure trends in the incidence of cancer is clearly and tragically demonstrated by childhood cancer statistics," states author David Steinman. According to the National Cancer Institute, deaths from childhood cancers decreased between 1973 and 1987. Yet between 1950 and 1988, the *incidence* of childhood cancers among whites increased 21.3 percent.

LIES, DAMN LIES, AND STATISTICS

Environmental public relations experts are masters of using what Ralph Nader has termed "the fabricated, phony, incomplete anecdote."

Take for example, the alleged cost of environmental protections. US industry claims that it must spend \$125 billion a year conforming to environmental regulations, a huge sum that is as impressive as it is unlikely.

Resources for the Future claims that environmental spending in the US amounts to 2.2 percent of GNP, higher than in any other country in the world. RFF also provides an odd rationale for cutting down old-growth forests: "Just as agriculture evolved from gathering and hunting to cropping and livestock raising, similarly forestry is beginning to evolve from the gathering of natural inventories to the cropping of forest plantations."

"How do the confusionists achieve their goal? By simply sowing enough confusion in the minds of Americans about the science . . . to defuse our collective concern and outrage, rendering us politically mute."

The chemical industry has used highly-funded disinformation campaigns to defend the use of chemicals including DDT (which causes cancer and damages the nervous system), chlorofluorocarbons (which destroy the ozone layer), and Alar (a carcinogenic ripening agent that was sprayed on apple trees and banned by the EPA in 1989).

Whelan cites the case of Alar as a "hoax" by environmentalists, and claims that "many of [the apple industry's] small growers were forced out of business" when Alar was banned. This assertion has been repeated time and again by industry flacks, but is based on no discernible facts. Richard Admanson of the National Cancer Institute echoes Whelan's position. He told *Fortune* magazine that eating an Alar-treated apple poses less risk "than that incurred by eating a well-done hamburger or a peanut butter sandwich."

Sometimes anti-environmentalists even parody themselves. Right-wing humorist P.J. O'Rourke tells his readers that one federal pollution regulation for wood preservatives will prevent one case of cancer every 2.9 million years at a cost of about \$5 trillion for each life saved.

But O'Rourke's satire is virtually indistinguishable from the statistics offered in dead earnest by industry representatives. According to Kent Jeffreys, who directs environmental studies at the far-right Competitive Enterprise Institute and is *not* a humorist, "Nationwide, regulation of [the herbicide] atrazine in drinking water would cost \$93 billion per life prolonged."

Atrazine is a Ciba-Geigy pesticide used on corn. In Dane County, Wisconsin (where *PR Watch* is published), more than half the wells have detectable levels of atrazine contamination, and there is no way to remove this carcinogen. ■