



Industry's role in disease prevention

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Practical tips on how and why industry should promote disease prevention are offered by the President of the American Public Health Association, Deputy Secretary of the New Mexico Health and Environment Department, Larry J. Gordon. These are excerpts of a talk Mr. Gordon made at a meeting of the Single Service Institute, Pinehurst, North Carolina.

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With regard to the environment and the economy, let us not be misled into a process of "versus" or "either/or." A quality environment and a healthy economy are not contradictory expectations; in fact, they are mutually interdependent. We can't have an economy without an environment. "Ecology" and "economy" are both derivatives of the Greek word "oikos" which means house. An economist was a keeper of the house, and an ecologist is a keeper of the big house we all live in - our environment - the place in which we are all going to spend the rest of our lives.

It is a matter of serious concern that humans sometimes seem more willing to suffer the health, social and economic consequences of disease and pollution than to pay for environmental health for this and future generations. Perhaps humans can slightly adapt to some degree of environmental degradation, but it is indeed alarming that humans might attempt to merely survive through adaptation rather than thrive through environmental quality.

We must have a realistic, accepted and working health policy based on health and wellness. All this will imply major changes in public health where the priorities will be centered around lifestyles and require a multitude of decisions by all of our citizens daily. A rational public health future is possible and whether it occurs or not depends upon all of us. One of our most compelling messages is not that our citizens can merely live longer, but enjoy

life more and feel younger. It is up to us to see that citizens view disease prevention, health promotion, and environmental quality as basic to the enjoyment of life.

The obstacles remain numerous, varied and formidable, but we must remember that public health is purchasable, and that within natural limitations any community may determine its own health status and environmental quality. Let's not allow disease prevention, health promotion and environmental quality to be ignored and left half way between leprosy and the quarantine station. Let's make certain that prevention and promotion programs are effectively supported, organized and administered.

What can you as citizens, taxpayers and industry leaders do about environmental health programs as they relate to your business interests?

1. Be knowledgeable about the issue:
2. Make certain that you and your key personnel get involved in the proper forums at the proper level to have an impact on the issue.
3. Get to know and communicate with the environmental health officials who are involved in the issues in which you are interested.
4. Hire your own "experts" as appropriate, either on an individual or cooperative basis with others in your industry.
5. Where necessary, support the training of your own experts through stipends for qualified students, just as governmental agencies do.
6. Recognize that the problems must be solved for the benefit of everyone in our society, and deal with the options in terms of alternatives and realistic timing and deadlines.
7. Insist on, and support, sound scientific research and data from properly designed studies and good laboratories.
8. Insist on having well-qualified environmental health personnel.
9. Insist that environmental health statutes that affect your industry provide for open public hearings, cross examinations, requirements for all evidence in the record, and judicial appeal prior to application of the regulations and the associated expense.
10. There is strength in unity. Continue to work with and through your industry structures.
11. Insist on clear, unambiguous statutes and regulations with equities to be determined by the courts instead of by government officials.

12. Remember that governmental officials are charged with carrying out statutory intent. If they go beyond this, blow the whistle on them with the appropriate legislative or judicial body.

13. Be active in health and environmental issues affecting your interests and your industry.

14. Remember that the public which environmental health officials are charged with protecting includes all citizens, from environmental and consumer activists to business and industry leaders.

Although it might seem that personal health issues are not so important to your economic interests, in reality they are. There are a number of points you might wish to consider that would have the effect of enhancing the health, comfort, morale, and productivity of your companies.

1. To begin with, you should make every effort to provide a healthy environment for your employees so as to enhance their health, reduce absenteeism, increase productivity, reduce your medical and insurance costs; and increase your profits.

2. Seriously consider providing or making available facilities for your employees to exercise, then promote the idea.

3. Consider providing health spa memberships for selected employees.

4. Support health promotion classes for your employees and include such subjects as smoking cessation, stress control, weight control, proper nutrition and hypertension control.

5. Consider tying in with a health maintenance organization that offers prevention services for your employees as well as the treatment services already offered by your group insurance plans. You might find the health maintenance organization approach more beneficial in terms of a cost-benefit ratio after you consider issues of absenteeism, morale, productivity and profits.

6. Designate smoking and non-smoking areas in the work place, lounges and cafeterias, so that all employees will not be forced to breathe secondhand smoke.

7. Consider requesting consultation service from the occupational safety and health agency in your area. This service is not sufficiently advertised, but is free, entirely separate from the enforcement activities, and non-punitive.

8. Develop or contract for a risk assessment and reduction service for you and your employees. Many not-for-profit as well as profit-making health groups are now offering such services. They will have the ultimate effect of being beneficial for your fiscal ledger sheet.

9. Consider placing fruits and juices in your snack bars and vending machines as alternatives to the junk foods currently available through most of them.

10. Consider sponsoring "self-health care" discussion groups to teach your employees more about healthful life-styles and personal care.

11. Sponsor "Troubled Employee" programs to provide confidential counseling for employees with alcohol, drug, or stress problems.

12. Try a little gambling, and support "pools" designed to promote weight reduction and smoking cessation.

13. Offer, or contract for screening, services for early diagnosis and treatment of such problems as hypertension, heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

14. Push legislative bodies to provide proper funding for disease prevention and health promotion in balance with sickness treatment services. It is a far superior cost-benefit arrangement for all taxpayers.

Escalating medical care costs have prompted many companies to closely scrutinize disease prevention and health promotion as appropriate measure to reduce such expenses. The list of concerned companies reads like a Who's Who of Business, and it includes, Xerox, General Foods, Phillips Petroleum, Pepsi Cola, Kimberly-Clark, Texaco, Control Data Corporation, IBM, American Telephone and Telegraph, Metropolitan Life and Ford Motor Company. Now, its your turn to consider your options in disease prevention, health promotion, and environmental health.

Perhaps the Single Service Institute is unique in having an Environmental and Health Committee to interface with personal and environmental health personnel and provide a valuable public service through its Crumbine Award. The single service industry's role in environmental and health issues helps promote good health programs and reduces polarization.

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