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**BUILDING QUALITY COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS:
A PLANNING MODEL TO GAIN AND MAINTAIN PUBLIC CONSENT[®]**

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ABSTRACT

No matter how good a corporation's overall environmental management system or its environmental health and safety department function, there is no guarantee that management will be able to build that new plant, introduce that new product, or maintain existing permits. The key to success and survival is the corporation's relationship with the local community and a variety of regulatory and special publics. Sadly, these relationships are often either ignored or poorly maintained. Communication with the community and special publics is the crucial ingredient. Keeping these relationships at appropriate levels requires periodic audits of community relationships and of communication techniques and approaches.

Today's business operating environment finds a public very sophisticated about science, environmental impact, and current issues. Contrary to industry and management assumptions, and despite this high level of knowledge, the public often sets rationality aside, making decisions using highly emotional approaches, ideas, and even hunches. Why is this so? Because community decision-making is always values-driven. As corporate management plans to assess its relationship with the community, it should recognize at least 10 communication realities:

1. Public consent is required, continuously.
2. Public involvement is necessary, ongoing, and often government mandated.
3. Public involvement can kill projects as well as permit them.
4. Public officials expect the business to win and maintain the public's support.
5. The news media will focus on the conflict, controversy, and opposition.

6. Personal self-interests, values, and needs take precedence over social values and needs.
7. Industrial and business facilities are often seen as threats to personal and self-interest values.
8. Business facilities have few inherent political constituencies and little political clout.
9. Personal fear is a factor.
10. Complex and scientific information about risk and probability – even when openly and clearly communicated to broad audiences – can, and often does, cause grave concern.

Business executives, scientists, bureaucrats, technologists, and government officials who believe there is a magical way to bring total rationality to environmental decision-making are destined to live lives filled with Maalox moments. The irritations to the process caused by values-driven decision-making are very real:

- Emotional communication has replaced reason.
- Activism has overtaken scientific investigation.
- Exaggeration often overwhelms precision.
- Grassroots manipulation is the new realism.

Science, data, and facts are important, but in the public decision-making process their importance is only as *background* to building emotional comfort that allows the public to accept a proposed environmental change. If the public's concerns are not addressed, or worse, minimized, trivialized, ignored, or belittled, the publics – whether the community, neighbors, activists, elected officials, or some combination of all these – in a position to manage the destiny of a company, a product, or an environmental situation, will take control and bring about defeat.

Management's principal linkage to these powerful interests is through communication, and much of the information communicated flows out of the environmental audit process. As such, in this monograph we will examine the critical communication concepts that, if correctly applied, can help businesses take advantage of information gained through environmental health and safety (EHS) audits to develop an effective strategy to gain and maintain consent from the community.

This monograph is constructed to meet several objectives:

- Audit checklists are included to help evaluate existing communication plans, strategies, policies, and tactics.
- Planning document models are included to aid in constructing communication-based relationships which will minimize the chances of failure and maximize the obtaining of community consent.
- Communication plan formats are presented for use as both audit and operational models.



If this Abstract has been helpful and you wish to acquire the entire text, please visit www.Amazon.com.

PRODUCT DETAILS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James E. Lukaszewski (loo-ka-SHEV-skee) advises, coaches, and counsels the men and women who run very large corporations and organizations. He is an expert in managing and counteracting tough, touchy, sensitive corporate communications issues. The fastest growing portion of his practice involves civil and criminal litigation. He is one of the few who can and truly does coach CEOs.

He is a prolific author (several books, hundreds of articles), lecturer (corporate, college and university), coach, and counselor. He is quoted in publications such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Miami Herald*, the *Harvard Business Review*, and industry trade journals. He is a columnist, advisor, or editor for almost every major public relations periodical. His 1992 book, *Influencing Public Attitudes: Strategies that Reduce the Media's Power*, remains a classic work in the field of direct communication. He is the author of the four-volume *Executive Action[®] Crisis Communication Management System* and has published 26 unabridged monographs on critical communication subjects since 1994. His newest book, *Why Should the Boss Listen to You?*, was published by Jossey-Bass in 2008.

He is an internationally recognized speaker on crisis management, ethics, media relations, public affairs, and reputation preservation and restoration. Visiting his Web site, www.e911.com, is like attending the University of Crisis Management.

An accredited member of the International Association of Business Communicators (ABC) and the Public Relations Society of America (APR), Mr. Lukaszewski is a member of the PRSA's College of Fellows (Fellow PRSA) and Board of Ethics & Professional Standards. He served as a crisis communications advisor to the International Disaster Advisory Committee, Agency for International Development, Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance from 1989 to 1992, and is a civilian advisor to several other federal agencies. He lectures annually at the U.S. Marine Corp's East Coast Commander's Media Training Symposium and was the second recipient of its Drew Middleton Award. He is the recipient of both Ball State University's 2004 National Public Relations Achievement Award and the 2004 Patrick Jackson Award for Distinguished Service to PRSA, and is among the winners of the 2005 *PR News* Lifetime Achievement Award. His name appeared in *Corporate Legal Times* as one of "28 Experts to Call When All Hell Breaks Loose," and in *PR Week* as one of 22 "crunch-time counselors who should be on the speed dial in a crisis."