

**MANAGEMENT'S
RESPONSIBILITY**

in

Air Pollution

By W. L. Stewart, Jr.,
*Executive Vice President,
Union Oil Company of California, and
Chairman of Smoke and Fumes Committees,
American Petroleum Institute and
Western Oil and Gas Association*

Before the Sixth Industrial Health Conference
Houston, Texas
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The problem of community air pollution is not new. Students of air pollution history know about London and her sulfur dioxide and soft coal smoke from documents dating back to the 13th century. In our own time we are all familiar with Liège—Donora—Pittsburgh—St. Louis—Los Angeles.

And we still have the problem—unsolved.

Recently, however, public opinion throughout the country has become very strong and exceedingly vocal that something be done about air pollution.

Major industries are awakening to the fact that reduction of air pollution is a proper cost of doing business.

I live in a community where for more than five years public opinion has been focused on the problem, and the people have run the gamut of cure-alls in an effort to get relief. Probably because the news of our efforts has traveled, and probably because I am a refiner in the industry most often

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the whipping boy of the uninformed in their crusade to get something done, I was invited here today to talk on "Management's Responsibility in Air Pollution."

I am going to tell you the Los Angeles story, and the part Western oil industry management has played in the community's effort to get a cleaner atmosphere.

When I accepted Mr. Charles Fleetwood's invitation to speak to you today, I recalled that someone had already stated in a few words the principle upon which I wished to base my remarks. These were:

"It would be no compliment to our American habits of thinking even to weigh the rights of industry against community welfare. Long ago it was concluded with admirable wisdom that not even government expediency should exercise precedence over persons and rights of the governed.

"There should be no question in our minds as to whether industry or the community is more deserving, whatever the issue. Industry, even in communities that are built around and upon industry, must remain subservient.

"Industry was conceived and built as a service arm of the community. Its purpose was and is to heighten and enrich human life, and only secondarily the lives of those who own and operate industry. When it fails of this purpose, or becomes as much a liability as an asset to those whom it purports to serve, then it has little excuse for surviving."

That is one man's way of saying that industry, to survive, must serve the people. I read into it further that industry in so serving must not even be a nuisance to the community. I agree with him one hundred per cent.

I contend it is one of management's number one responsibilities, both public-relations and conscience-wise, to see that industry is a good citizen.

I think that we of industrial management should consider polluted air one of our top-priority problems. I believe air pollution will be corrected through the cooperative efforts of industrial management, research, and an informed public.

It is mandatory, in my estimation, that management sees to it that industry clearly demonstrates its position, its community interest, by assuming leadership in fighting air pollution.

These opinions of mine are shared quite fully by management in the petroleum industry, and I want to tell you what we on the West Coast have been doing, and expect to do in the future, about the air pollution problem.

There is evidence that many years ago most of the petroleum industry recognized our responsibility to the communities in which we operated. Our refinery stacks were emitting smokes and gases to the skies; our plants were causing unpleasant odors to permeate the atmosphere. We wondered just how much of a nuisance we were, and what we could do about it. We believed, and still most emphatically do, that management of the petroleum industry should *voluntarily* appraise the possible contributions of our industry to air pollution.

Our own scientists in the West found the problem highly complex and required the use of scientific personnel, equipment and approaches not normally available in industry's laboratories.

So in 1947 the Stanford Research Institute, an independent organization serving the West, was engaged by the Western Oil and Gas Association, representing some 200 California oil companies. This Institute was told to find out **WHAT** the pollutants are, **HOW** they pollute, **WHERE** they originate, and the **CORRECTIVE STEPS TO TAKE**. Thus was begun what is probably the most extensive, and expensive, research program so far undertaken anywhere to learn the sources of air pollution and the ways to correct it.

Now five years later, and after the release of three interim reports (the fourth is being prepared), and after an expenditure of one and a quarter million dollars, there are many questions still unanswered and many problems yet unsolved. We know now there is no simple solution.

A survey conducted a couple of years ago showed that about 50,000 tons of fuel and rubbish were burned daily in Los Angeles County. Public and industrial burning of these materials emitted to the air each day at least 2,100 tons of combustion products, excluding carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. Household burning of tons of trash sent organic materials into the air every day. About two-thirds of the chemicals that entered the air from combustion were organic in nature. Exhaust fumes from 2,000,000 automobiles, buses and trucks which drove an average of 50,000,000 miles

a day are now known to have added at least another 900 tons of organic substances.

It's a fact then that each of us—each home—each car contributes to the overall nuisance. And I say this in spite of the fact our critics will say that I am trying to divert attention from my own sins.

However, while industry is only partially to blame, it seems clear that we must take the lead in cleaning up; must not only get our own house in order but lend help to others to clear the skies.

No enlightened person can dispute that we are entitled to as clean air as technology and economics can bring about. But where there are people and industry it is unrealistic to expect the completely unsullied air of a distant countryside.

In no two communities is the problem exactly alike. Yet each may profit from the mistakes, the progress, the efforts of the others. Perhaps from our experience we can set up guideposts to courses we have found to be right; to those we have found to be deadends. None of the paths is without treacherous turns.

Just before I left home to come here a very zealous small community city board of directors suggested that the refiners be forced, and I quote "to turn the clock back to prewar times and revert to the old method of distilling gasoline" under the impression that the "cracking" method of manufacturing gasoline releases a greater amount of pollutants to the air. Obviously they did not understand the scientific work on which their suggestion was based—but then maybe they would prefer old Dobbin to their Fords and Cadillacs.

We don't know yet how to fully solve the air pollution problem—outside of tossing away the keys to our cars, shutting down our factories, throwing thousands out of work, wrecking the community's economy, and forcing everyone to abandon his home.

But I can tell you four ways that have already been tried which WON'T solve the problem, and may even seriously delay the solution:

(1) DEMAGOGUERY won't cure pollution. The demagogue, with excessive zeal and hypnotized by his own super-heated verbosity, would padlock all industry and plunge the people into bankruptcy. That would be as silly as cutting your throat to cure dandruff. Demagoguery may be a great

vote-getter, but it can only obstruct the orderly, objective approach that must be taken.

(2) EMOTION or HYSTERIA won't cure pollution. In 1940 Los Angeles County had a population of 2,000,000. Today there are well over 4,000,000 of us with our automobiles and trucks, our homes and our trash-burners, our industries. With that growth the increase in air pollution was so great that the natural air conditioning machinery of our area failed. Then one day, to many, it seemed smog came all at once. The ensuing hue and cry amounted almost to hysteria as more and more people became conscious of lowered visibility, smarting eyes, unpleasant odors. We, the aroused public, clamored for immediate relief. As is so often the case, our emotions didn't let us think the problem through. The answer seemed to be a law, a law that would stop someone from doing something, whatever it was. And this experience has convinced us that

(3) LAWS alone won't cure pollution.

We got ourselves a law with plenty of teeth in it. Under the law the Los Angeles Air Pollution Control District was established with authority to grant permits, prosecute air pollution offenders, etc. Now we would be rid of smog. But it didn't work out that way. Years later and after spending millions of dollars we still have smog.

The Control District office began wielding a big stick. Public opinion was stirred up first against one industry, then another. It wasn't long until everyone was in pretty much of an uproar. Ironically, oil refineries became one of the principal scapegoats of public indignation. I say "ironically" because since 1928 the American Petroleum Institute has been studying and advising on control of refinery wastes.

In all the emotional confusion, someone decided, without taking time to ascertain the facts, that sulfur dioxide was the "villain." So, under the pressure of public opinion, we took hydrogen sulfide out of our refinery fuel to prevent the formation of sulfur dioxide, at a cost of many millions of dollars, I might add. This was to be the "cure-all." It wasn't, of course, since there were many other sources of sulfur dioxide, and certainly many, many other pollutants.

In the meantime the public had become sulfur dioxide conscious and developed a lot of ill-will toward certain industries—ill-will that persisted long after the sulfur dioxide theory was properly discounted.

I merely mention this as one instance of using a big stick without sufficient facts, where emotion displaced reasoning, and the law was unproductive of constructive results.

Today practically every activity in the Los Angeles basin covered by regulations of the Air Pollution Control act is operating well within the legal limits of the law. And we still have smog. This, it seems to most of us in the petroleum business, is pretty good evidence that laws alone can never solve the problem.

The Stanford Law Review says that "the major barrier to a successful smog program is *scientific*, not legal. While a city is legally able to attack its air pollution problem, the success of the program will be geared to the success of science in discovering what the contaminant or contaminants are that cause smog, and in developing technical devices for eliminating the contaminant."

Louis C. McCabe of the U. S. Bureau of Mines tersely says "the passing of a punitive law is no solution . . ."

(4) CALLING NAMES and HURLING CHARGES is the fourth way in which air pollution cannot be cured. In Los Angeles, for example, enough names have been called and enough charges tossed back and forth to last all of us for several generations. And the solution was brought no nearer.

All of us were seeking exactly the same objective—a cleaner, clearer, more wholesome atmosphere in which to work, to play, to live. We found out—as all of us really knew in the first place—that cooperation, not condemnation, is necessary if we are to solve the problem.

You here in Harris County know how true that is. I remember your Walter Quebedeaux telling us at a meeting out in Los Angeles that by a program of cooperation . . . it has been possible to substantially reduce the air pollution caused by industrial plants in Harris County. He went on further to say that in the State of Texas there is sufficient legal machinery to handle any nuisance, but it was found, and believed, that a plan of cooperation with the industries involved will accomplish much more in a shorter time than can ever be done through direct court action.

We of the petroleum industry are determined to take four corrective steps—four *VOLUNTARY* steps. First, we will learn to what extent we offend.

Second, we will learn what we are offending with. Third, we will endeavor to correct it. Fourth, we will keep it corrected. And we are going to go even further than that. We are going to continuously police ourselves.

Modern-day industry *can* police itself, even as it has cooperated and will continue to cooperate with public officials and public bodies. We know that in the interests of good business, and the American way of life, it is smart to discharge our responsibilities to the community as completely as our economic ability permits.

We all like a pat on the back for a job well done, and the chances are we won't get it until the job is done—but we must not let the lack of appreciation of our efforts in any way affect our determination to do the job. And knowing in our hearts that we are right we can be sure that our good intentions, coupled with our efforts and our resources, and the passing of the necessary time, will eventually bring cleaner air.

In assuming leadership in the fight to conquer air pollution, I believe we should speak out—let our actions be known and recognized. It is my belief that an informed public is a patient, understanding public.

I believe management and industry should keep the public informed. When people understand, they will be willing to face reality. I have confidence that the people of any community, if given the facts clearly and objectively, will have a better understanding of the complexity of the problem, and a more sympathetic attitude towards industry—industry which supplies the jobs, the payrolls, and carries so much of the tax burden.

To do this properly we need good relations with the press. There is no reason why we of industry should “choose up sides” with the press. Far better for all that we cooperate. I am sure newspapers as a whole would welcome the kind of cooperation that alone can create the intelligent public opinion which must exist before the problem can be solved. After all, we are all seeking the same goal.

I expect there are some of you who are critical of my approach in this paper. You may feel I have taken an emotional angle—or stressed how the community should NOT behave—or put too much emphasis on factors obstructing management's efforts.

I have taken the approach deliberately and intentionally. I believe that only by being realistic and recognizing all of the facets of the problem,

and by being willing to face them, can management discharge its responsibility in air pollution.

This, then, is my thinking on "Management's Responsibility in Air Pollution." We must be a good community fellow; we must assert leadership in the fight to control air pollution; we must continue to sponsor research; we must improve our public relations, and we must cooperate with the press. And we must, and shall, do all of these willingly, and sincerely.