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## EARTH WEEK: TIME FOR INDUSTRY TO JOIN UP?

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"Confrontation and demonstration is no longer an effective strategy. What we need now is a more cooperative, more reasoned, and long-term approach to environmental problems and the programs set up to solve them."

That comment was written on the margin of one of the questionnaires Burson-Marsteller sent (early January, 1971) to 540 of the nation's largest industrial corporations.

Our objective was to define the attitude of the industrial community toward what is generally described as the "environmental crisis." We asked industry leaders to describe their reaction to Earth Day-1970 and what preparations, if any, they had made for the week-long observance -- Earth Week-1971 -- scheduled April 19 to 25.

We received 173 replies to our questionnaire -- a return of 32 percent. While tabulating the data we interviewed student and environmentalist groups, and got from our Washington office a report on what's happening in Congress and in the Federal agencies.

Here's a summary of our findings. There are three principal points:

- \* Expressions of concern about the environment are changing from emotional outbursts to specific, constructive proposals;
- \* The action is moving off the college campuses and into the communities;
- \* A new voice, the voice of the corporation, is beginning to participate -- forcefully and effectively -- in the debate on pollution and what is to be done about it.

#### Action at the Local Level

The first two trends were predictable. Parades, picket lines, and sit-ins may have served a purpose a year ago. They focused attention; they forced a reaction. But they have given way, inevitably, to reasoned approaches. The slogan is no longer: "Do something!" It is: "How shall we do it?"

It was also inevitable, we think, that the enthusiasts and "thinkers" on the campuses would give way to more action-minded leadership.

Last year, Earth Day was education-oriented. Environmental Teach-In, Inc., the Washington-based coordinating group, had strong political and financial backing. The steering committee was headed by Senator Gaylord Nelson (D., Wis.) and Congressman Paul N. McCloskey Jr. (R., Calif.). Committee members included representatives of student and faculty groups, and a full-time staff of seven coordinated activities to "widen the base of educated support for the environmental movement."

Environmental Teach-In, Inc. is no longer functioning. Its successor, Environmental Action, Inc., also based in Washington, has no plans (or sufficient funds or staff) to coordinate campus activities. It is expected to go along with established conservation groups -- such as Friends of the Earth and the Sierra Club -- in encouraging local programs during Earth Week.

Ralph Nader, the influential leader of consumer causes, has sponsored the only organized campus effort this year. His Earth Action Group plans to "organize and coordinate fund-raising activities designed to involve all high school and college students." The funds will be used to form "permanent teams of scientists and lawyers to work on ecological problems at the local level."

This local-level approach is echoed by other groups. Environment!, for example, a New York organization, tells its supporters: "It is our feeling at Environment! and the feeling of a number of people from around the country with whom we have been in touch, that a more directed observance would be appropriate for 1971."

As an Earth Week-1971 issue, Environment! proposes emphasis on pollution caused by the automobile. Conservation or environmental groups in highly industrial communities can be expected to concentrate their attention on industrial pollution of the air and water. In Los Angeles, New Orleans or New Haven, the issue may be oil pollution. In cities bordering the Great Lakes, it may be the effect of plant effluent on fish and other aquatic life.

### Changing Styles and Attitudes

The third general trend turned up by our inquiries -- active involvement of the industrial community -- is, we think, the most significant. In the past, industry has been the principal target of the environmentalists. Their reasoning was quite simple: Manufacturers, in pursuit of profits, despoiled our natural resources and, because it was cheap and convenient, routed industrial wastes into the air, the soil, and the waterways.

That reasoning is no longer valid.

As recently as ten years ago ecology was defined as the "mutual relationship between organisms and their environment." The word "problem" hadn't been added. When Pittsburgh was described as "the smoky city" one didn't think automatically of pollution. Detergents that made clothes or dishes cleaner, food preservatives or additives, nonreturnable packaging -- among many other product or processing developments -- were considered modern industrial "miracles." And the automobile engine -- not then known as a source of air pollution -- was a symbol of the American genius for mechanical design.

All this, of course, has changed. And there have been corresponding changes in our life style. The population has increased; cities have grown into "urban complexes;" the demand for manufactured goods -- steel, plastics, paper, all types of natural and synthetic furnishings and materials -- has steadily expanded.

Somewhere along the line, and not so very long ago, we became aware that modern methods in industry, in agriculture, in manufacturing were adversely affecting the environment. Perhaps we had thought our resources were limitless and that the air, the soil, the lakes, certainly the oceans, could absorb any quantity of byproducts and wastes.

The abrupt change in the nation's thinking about "ecological damage" can be dated from the publication of Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring," in September, 1962.

It took the general public several years to accept Mrs. Carson's premise. It took industry even longer. But today there is general agreement that industry, government, and the public are facing up to the problems of environmental pollution -- earth, air, water, and sound.

#### The Conservationist's Point of View

As a public relations firm, Burson-Marsteller was well aware of the developing confrontation between industry and the public long before Earth Day-1970. We had counseled several of our clients on problems relating to pollution and waste disposal. And, of course, we had observed at first hand industry's dilemma as it made every effort to meet the legitimate requirements of both government and the public.

In a "White Paper" we prepared last year: "Earth Day: Guidelines for Corporate Response," we described the forces guiding the Earth Day observance, analyzed their objectives, and proposed constructive ways in which industry might respond. On the intent of the observance itself, we said:

"No one denies the validity -- or importance -- of the conservationist's point of view. The teach-ins may develop much useful material. The demonstrations may focus attention on local conditions that must be remedied. Nor can one question the credentials of the leaders of the Earth Day program. Their organization has the support of influential men in government -- in Congress and at the Cabinet level..."

The concern with environmental problems will continue and, in the decade ahead, become even more intense. Early this year, Senator Nelson introduced an "Environmental Protection Package" which included a call for Congress to designate the third week in April annually as Earth Week. Referring to the previous year's observance, he said:

"Earth Day was a remarkable event that marked a changing point of view in the politics of the country. A new issue has been born and it is here to stay."

Senator Nelson then introduced his "package" of 24 bills and resolutions proposing regulations ranging from a ban on ocean dumping and environmental

studies on detergents to a recycling tax on packaging, controls on strip mining, a moratorium on new ocean oil well drilling, pesticide reform, and wildlife protection.

"The question is," Senator Nelson said, "whether we can join together in a massive cooperative effort to preserve the integrity and livability of our environment before it is too late. We have the means, but only if we have the will."

Along with other environmentalists, he appears to be convinced that industry (he describes it as "established and entrenched economic interests") will oppose environmental change.

Based on our observations, Senator Nelson -- on this point at least -- is not realistic.

#### The Response to Confrontation

Our survey on industry response to Earth Day-1970 and its preparation for Earth Week-1971 offers many interesting insights.

First: How did the 173 industrial companies (which answered our survey) react to the demonstrations on Earth Day-1970?

Twelve reported major demonstrations -- picketing; mass rallies; mailings; bus tours of plant areas; dumping cans on property to protest manufacture of nonreturnables. The companies responded by talking to the demonstrators, meetings with committees, and distribution of literature. One company sponsored an Earth Day conference with college students and municipal leaders.

Sixty-six companies actively participated in local "teach-ins." Others provided speakers, supplied background materials to schools, participated in TV and radio series and school seminars.

Did the Earth Day-1970 confrontations or teach-ins influence subsequent corporate policy toward environmental problems? Thirty-four companies said yes; 119 said no. Twelve of the firms that did say Earth Day-1970 had a substantial influence reported they set up new or revised policies on pollution. Eighteen established closer ties with the community to solve ecological problems. One plant noted "the need for more information directed to community residents." One company "accelerated installation of pollution abatement equipment well before the deadline."

One hundred twelve companies (65 percent) reported that they now have a "committee or task force" responsible for considering and acting upon environmental problems.

On attitudes toward Earth Week-1971 and preparations for responding to demonstrators:

Thirty-four companies reported they have programs to cooperate with community and/or student groups. Others have set up speakers bureaus and prepared brochures or newsletters that describe their antipollution plans and projects.



The question, "What does your management think about Earth Week," brought 92 responses. Eighty were constructive. A typical statement: "The observance is an important expression, among many others, of growing emphasis upon the need to solve ecological and environmental problems."

Another view: "Our management believes Earth Week can serve as an excellent focal point for both the problems and the progress associated with environmental quality."

Another: "We believe in preventing pollution every day of the year."

Should industry become actively involved in the programs and objectives of Earth Week?

One hundred eight companies (62 percent) answered yes.

#### The New Corporate Attitude

A "catch-all" question asking for opinions on environmental problems facing industry and on the "confrontation" with environmentalists brought responses that indicate a changing corporate attitude.

One manufacturer said: "While changes should and will be made, they cannot be made overnight. Environmentalists should try to understand this, and most do. Consumer education should be stressed to avoid situations such as the cartoon showing an 'environmentalist' rally in session with the second panel showing the masses voicing approval and the final panel showing the mess left after the rally."

Another comment: "Public awareness is good, and constructive efforts to solve ecological problems are welcome. However, irrational demands and insistence upon unrealistic -- even impossible -- goals can certainly do more harm than good. Sound planning and organization can produce reasonable results."

A succinct statement of a general attitude: "How does one define pollution? And what remedies is one willing to make? Are quasipolitical issues such as the SST question legitimate environmental issues? If my plant converts to all-electric can I fault the electric company for the increased pollution made necessary by my increased demands? Concern is not enough; you must have definable goals (beyond generalities like 'let's clean up the environment') in order to progress."

A comment that illustrates how close industry (or segments of it) have come to the environmentalist's viewpoint: "Industry must do all in its power to improve the quality of the environment. It must: 1-eliminate or effectively reduce its pollutants; and 2-develop new technologies to cope with ecological unbalances in general."

A final statement by an industry spokesman is a fair summary of what has to be done and, possibly, how. "The point of confrontation is not whether these things should be done (there are as many environmentalists in industry as in our universities), but rather how they should be done.

"At present, industry is receiving very little support in its cleanup

effort. It is being asked -- indeed ordered -- to fill a public need in the absence of a public market. And it is being told that if it does not fill the public need it will be shut down, or its profits will be curtailed.

"On its own behalf, industry must submit that this, alone, is a singularly destructive way to solve the problem. Penalties for flagrant violation of the law should be accompanied by: 1-rewards, in the form of tax incentives, for installing expensive pollution-control equipment; and 2-awards, in the form of government contracts, for developing new means for solving ecological problems."

#### The Advantages of Coalition

Our survey, our research, and our insights into corporate attitudes leads us to ask this question: Is it time for industry to meet with government and with the conservationists (as representatives of the public) in a cooperative effort to solve the environmental crisis which confronts us all?

We think it is time for this three-sided approach as opposed to the type of confrontation that puts government and the environmentalists on one side of the table and industry on the other.

It's quite obvious that government is taking a progressively stronger position on pollution control. Senator Nelson's "Environmental Protection Package" is an indication of the scope of legislative regulation that can be anticipated. And the new Environmental Protection Agency, which will

combine and coordinate the work of several Federal agencies charged with protecting the environment, is certain to step up the pace of standards-setting and regulation.

Government influence is extending to state and local levels as well. Recently, a state forced the closing of a major chemical plant because it could not meet the state's clean water standards within a specified time period. One of many examples of local action: a city council banned the use of nonreturnable packaging.

Environmental protection groups and conservationists are also stronger. They represent a rising tide of public opinion directed against environmental problems ranging all the way from offensive plant odors, smog, and urban blight to thermal or chemical pollution of the water, high-decibel noise, and private encroachment on the marshlands, forest preserves, and wilderness areas.

Thus far, the corporations and a few industry associations have dealt with both government and the public on an individual basis. We think so important a force (and participant) in the ecological debate should consider a more unified approach. An Industry/Environment Coalition. Or task force. Or committee.

As one of the industry leaders who responded to our questionnaire put it: "We need more constructive discussion and action on both sides of the fence."

Yes, but first, perhaps, industry should find ways to carry on the discussion on a more organized basis.

There would be many advantages of an industry coalition.

Industry could work closely with government to establish workable environmental standards in both general and particular areas.

It could pool its contacts with Federal agencies and, possibly, combine some of its research projects.

It would be in the strongest possible position to deal with the question central to every discussion on environmental reform: Who is going to pay the bill? The public, of course, must ultimately bear the cost. But shall the payment be in the form of increased prices or higher taxes? Industry -- all segments of it -- should be heard before that important decision is made.

#### Time to Join Up?

I'll close this report by citing two examples that illustrate industry's changing attitude toward pollution control.

Over a period of 40 years, a Midwestern power producer invested \$25,000 annually in capital equipment for pollution abatement. The same power company has just committed \$25,000,000 for pollution abatement equipment to be installed over the next five years.

A major steel producer published, several years ago, a formal policy statement pledging to clean the air and water used in its plant operations. After the expenditure of close to \$100 million, the major antipollution projects have been completed. The president of the company remarked: "Today you have to depend on the highway signs to find our plants -- you no longer have the red smoke as a guide."

Isn't it time for all segments of industry to join the other two major participants (government and the public) in a constructive Earth Week dialogue? And after Earth Week, isn't it also time for industry to think about combining its various voices (and ideas, problems, and objectives) into a single voice that, in many cases at least, can speak for them all?

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