

ADVERTISING, PUBLIC INFORMATION & SCHOOL EDUCATION

“If there is anything we wish to change in the child,
we should first examine it and see whether it is not something that
could be better changed in ourselves.”

---Carl Gustav Jung

OVER-ARCHING DISTRICT PHILOSOPHY

EXCERPT FROM THE CVSWMD GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CVSWMD Recognizes Education As The Key To Sustainable Behavioral Changes in Waste Management

- e. Awareness and education must lead to understanding and commitment so as to result in successful behavioral change;
- f. Adults and young people both must be made aware of the rationale for best waste management practices;
- g. Businesses and institutions must also be influenced to improve waste management practices;
- h. Coupled with every District service and program, the message should be clear that the ultimate responsibility for reduction in solid waste lies with each individual generator.

Fig. 19

The CVSWMD includes education as one of our organization's *Guiding Principles*, and the clarifying statements reveal both our beliefs and our intentions. We understand the power of education as being the means to achieve the behavioral change necessary for us to meet our goals. We also understand that education alone cannot achieve results. Item (a.) in the above excerpt states clearly that our educational efforts must be developed in a way that can "lead to understanding and commitment." Item (d) offers our perspective on accountability, for while we intend to raise awareness in all age groups, we ultimately hold the individual generator responsible. These are critical statements, and they color our approach to advertising, public information and school education.

In the first instance, simply producing and disseminating information irregardless of format, medium or content becomes insufficient or at the least haphazard. Inherent in this statement is the idea that in order to achieve our goals, we must be careful and knowledgeable about the media used and be clear in our delivery. The information must persuade a specific audience to act in the desired manner. It must have the power to cause commitment. It must be delivered in several different ways and must be able to withstand the passage of time.

We also see education as more than a single item, such as an ad or brochure, or a program such as a theatre performance. Education is a process composed of many different yet integrated actions focused on achieving a specific change in behavior – for instance, toxics reduction. This is why we frequently refer to "educational efforts" instead of using the term "programming." For our purposes, educational programming is a project that is purely educational in nature – such as our DeTox Family project. All aspects of it are designed to teach someone something. In contrast, our Drop 'N Swap textile reuse and recycling program has educational efforts of many types as components of it.

The following true vignette may help to illuminate the challenges we face in creating successful educational efforts.

On November 5, 2002, after presenting a workshop for parents on reducing household toxic products, one of our staff members forwarded a suggestion from an attendee to our hazardous waste coordinator. The parent suggested making a sign for the HHW

collection to be posted at the local recycling drop-off depot in the same town where the HHW collection is held. Both of the staff members dealing with this suggestion were new to our organization, and thought it to be a simple and wonderful idea that we should employ. Through additional inter-office communication, our marketing/communications manager was able to offer these two, new staff members the following information, and a great learning experience concerning advertising and public education.

All CVSWMD HHW events are advertised in the following ways:

- * Newspaper ads;
- * Calendar listings in all newspapers which serve District towns;
- * Fliers handed out at all the District depots;
- * Sandwich board signs at all of the district-run depots;
- * HHW events are listed in the *Garbage Guidelines* publication, which are available to be distributed at all depots;
- * Fliers distributed at the Barre Home Show;
- * Notices/short articles are sent to town newsletters (about 4 towns have newsletters);
- * Fliers sent to town clerks and selectboard chairs;
- * Usually a "kick off" article in the District column in the Times Argus.

While the parent making the suggestion was well-intentioned, she has not noticed all the advertising and educational materials produced and distributed annually about our hazardous waste collections. In our experience, people often don't "notice" our advertising until they have been personally affected by one of our programs or affected by a product they need to dispose of.

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If simply printing or speaking words could achieve immediate behavior change, there would be no smokers left in our population, no one would fail at dieting and all of us would be perfectly fit. However, the truth is that only those who are dissatisfied with the current situation will "hear or see" the messages. An even smaller number of those people will attempt to change, with yet a smaller percentage achieving sustainable new behaviors. Before any of us can begin to act differently, we must also be sufficiently enticed by the idea to contemplate the change. The next step to change is to practice. According to behavioral scientists, it takes approximately 12 consecutive weeks of repetitive practice before a new behavior can be considered a habit. This type of mindfulness is difficult to maintain and must be reinforced in order to result in the desired achievement. Neither a flier, a brochure, nor a one-time ad in the newspaper has the power to affect this type of change. The educational effort must be more sophisticated and comprehensive.

It must also have a specific audience. Item (d) of our education principle establishes an emphasis which is, we believe, unique among the Districts in Vermont and new to us as well. It holds the generator responsible for change. In practice, this means two things. First, that all educational efforts will target specific audiences. Secondly, the CVSWMD will no longer focus its educational efforts to achieve community-wide behavioral change on school-age children. This latter practice diverges from what has become a commonplace practice of using classroom education to influence parents and families. We've come to believe that using a child's influence on others as a tool to achieve change places them in an often difficult position of choosing between belief systems. An adult or family's perceived right to burn or dump; the value an individual places on acquisition of "things" as proof of their worth; and social values that place high regard on appearances as a measure of one's worth are all examples of belief systems that can be challenged by waste reduction and diversion messages. These consumption-oriented values may be integral to a family system. The youngster that brings home conflicting values from school may find themselves in confusing or even volatile situations.

We prefer to protect our youngsters, and to believe in the adaptability of the adults in our culture and the power and integrity of the messages we have to present to them in regards to solid waste management. We intend to place responsibility for change on the adult individual, and therein give over the power to change our society. Since adults control our social systems, as they change, so will the structures. This leads to sustainability that is automatically taught to the children in our world through modeling, practice and expectations. We prefer to attempt to exact change in this manner.

The CVSWMD sees the means of affecting change as lying within our programming. Advertising, public information and school education are integral, specialized components of this larger endeavor. The following defines how we use each of these components within our programming.

Advertising. Our primary goal for any ad is to clearly describe an upcoming event or an ongoing program, and to inform potential users or participants about critical details they may need in order to participate. A secondary purpose is to entice

listeners or readers to participate. Successful advertising is well designed for the audience identified as potential users of the service, focuses only on the necessary information, and is placed in a medium that the target audience regularly sees and/or hears. The CVSWMD uses advertising to promote our activities, not behaviors. The District does not have a sufficient budget with which to accomplish the latter; this requires "market saturation" over a period of many weeks or months in which a perception of individual need or desire are established in a large portion of the population. While not a typical component of advertising, the District also uses Public Service Announcements (PSA's), public relations efforts that result in publicity (news coverage) as a means of expanding the impact of our advertising budgets for particular events or programs.

Public Information. Any print material that is generated to explain an issue or topic constitutes public information. This information may be presented in a casual manner or via a designed format. Handouts, fliers, brochures, workbooks, posters, slide shows, and displays are all examples of the different ways in which public information may be captured for dissemination. The most effective types of work in this realm will target a very specific audience (for instance, families with children in kindergarten), and the design, tone, appearance and method of delivery will be geared to be appealing and convenient to that audience.

School Education. Typically, this type of effort refers to an audience of young people grades pre-K through high school. Special in-classroom presentations, curricula, assemblies, and theater presentations are examples of the types of efforts that are typically used to teach children. These endeavors are seen as an adjunct to the regular classroom work of a teacher.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- The District should maintain its marketing/communications position and ensure that seasoned and creative individuals are hired to fill this position whenever a vacancy occurs. This will ensure that our efforts to support behavioral change adapt to the rising level of accomplishment and the change within each targeted community.
- Programs for children should focus on raising awareness about issues and offer opportunities for age-appropriate personal choice.

- Every District program will be seen as an educational opportunity for affecting change and reinforcing successful accomplishment of the desired change. For instance, our drop-off facilities will no longer be seen as facilities that take people's waste. Rather, we will see them as ongoing opportunities for convincing people to increasingly divert more items from each bag of waste they bring to the depot. The design, atmosphere, tone and type of interactions with staff, pricing, range of options, etc. will be geared to move behavior towards less and less waste.
- The District will give priority to active educational endeavors vs. passive opportunities. In particular we will focus on creating experiential learning opportunities for adults. All educational endeavors will identify an evaluation mechanism for determining the degree of change achieved through our efforts. Advertising and public information will be integral components of these endeavors.
- Every staff person and Board Supervisor of the District will be held accountable for acting in a way that both models and encourages others to achieve the behavior change stated in our Plan while conducting official District business. "Walking our talk" is an extremely effective educational effort.
- The District will seek to cross-sell program initiatives as often as possible in order to achieve maximum benefit from advertising and public information.
- Programming will include an adequate budget for advertising and the creation and dissemination of public information in recognition of their importance in achieving behavioral change.
- When the District creates school programming it will be to offer youngsters hands-on examples or experiences related to things over which they have personal control, or in which they play a part due to the decision of the school administration. For instance, classes in which children are taught a reuse message via creation of sock puppets or other crafts offers them the opportunity to rethink their consumptive behaviors. Activities such as classroom experiments relating to composting might be appropriate if the teacher creates an in-classroom opportunity for composting remains of snacks, or the school engages in food waste diversion.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

The District is at a cross-roads in educational programming. We have many programs that rely on passive education and these are being reconsidered for their value and consistency with this Plan. These will either be eliminated or transformed to meet our new understanding of the effectiveness that can be realized through targeted, active educational endeavors. We have also begun developing and testing programming that serves this purpose. The DeTox Family project and its companion workshop, the illegal burning program, and craft-based reuse workshops are all examples of educational programs with hands-on components that are designed to motivate a specific adult audience to embrace behavioral change.

Our board and staff have achieved a new level of awareness, and we are undergoing our own behavioral change challenge in regards to looking at existing programming and creating new endeavors. The recent decision of our board to place 100% of all our school-based educational funding towards the DeTox Family project for five years is based on their recognition of the documentable behavior change able to be achieved through this program. In comparison, the entertaining and informative in-classroom and theatre-based programming we had formerly supported with the same funding could not demonstrate any direct results.

The District will continue to seek out efforts that can provide us with a "return on our investment." Specifically, we will target education funding to support programs that have behavioral change as their goal and a mechanism for determining the level of success being achieved in affecting change.

This plan will not list specific educational efforts or programs that we intend to carry-out in the next decade. Education is a dynamic process. What we learn today becomes the cornerstone for tomorrow's lessons. Information builds upon itself and cognitive leaps occur in unpredictable sequences. To proscribe a set course of educational action today would overlook the possibilities of these jumps in understanding. Instead, we have set out priorities and goals. We will develop programming and evaluate each effort on an ongoing basis. We will be poised to note and understand any leaps that are occurring in our region's population. We will take this information into consideration as we revise and develop subsequent programs. Given this flexibility, we expect that whatever method is chosen as the

vehicle for educating a targeted audience will be the best possible choice. We will continue to share anything we develop with others who find it interesting or suited to their purposes. Given the importance the District places on education, as stated in our Guiding Principles, all the work of the District will now have an educational focus.

Issues and Questions to be Answered

- What new educational initiatives should be incorporated into our five-year program plan, and which existing programs should be changed or deleted? The staff will make recommendations on these matters during the development of the program plan that will coordinate with this Plan.
- Are there partnerships with other organizations or institutions that could become beneficial associations for us both in terms of educating the public? What are these and how can we suggest collaboration?