

Musca publicica: Charleston Experiments with a New Species of Fly Publicity

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"It has become traditional in the United States to attach unusual importance to firsts. The first baby of the year, the first traffic fatality, the first robin, the first tooth, even the first gray hair always come in for special notice of one kind or another. Today climaxes the world's first Fall Fly Week, or indeed, the first Fly Week of any season, so far as I know. In any event, it is a first of more than passing significance."

Thus Dr. W. Palmer Dearing, Deputy Surgeon General, began a speech keynoting Charleston's Fall Fly Week, 5 days of intensive publicity – September 18-22, 1950 – during which the citizens of the West Virginia capital were assailed with fly facts by newspaper, radio, speech, leaflet, poster, and other media of information.

Fall Fly Week had been conceived 7 weeks earlier at a meeting of Dr. N. H. Dyer, State Health Commissioner; Dr. L. A. Dickerson, Kanawha-Charleston Health Officer; Mr. Joseph Fitzpatrick, CDC Representative for Region III; Mr. J. H. Coffey, in charge of Fly Control Section, Engineering Services, CDC; and the authors.

This group adopted as the theme for Fall Fly Week, "A Report to the People at the Halfway Mark," because summer 1950 represented the midpoint in the projected 5-year program.

FIVE OBJECTIVES

Early in the planning, five objectives were set. They were:

1. To inform the public that statistical, epidemiological, and entomological activities recently had been added to the fly control operations, which had been under way for 2½ years.

2. To stress the disease transmission aspects of the program, which had taken on a new importance with the assignment of new personnel.

3. To emphasize sanitation. The degree of fly control obtained so far, most engineers agreed, was due largely to spray activity. To achieve even greater fly control, they felt, the public would have to be convinced of the necessity for improving sanitation.

4. To reiterate the successful cooperation between State and city-county health departments and the U. S. Public Health Service. Public agen-

cies always make friends outside when they make it known that they have good working relationships.

5. Finally, to conduct an experiment in public relations. A field test of certain techniques previously used elsewhere for getting public cooperation in health programs was needed.

The first 3 weeks after conception were spent planning and preparing material; only during the second 3 weeks were the first stories actually released and initial contacts made. Four background memoranda, for different release dates, provided factual information for press, radio, and other organizations whose assistance was needed.

HEALTH INFORMATION PROGRAM

Time, personnel, and money were lacking to carry out a big public relations campaign. Despite these limitations, good community cooperation made it possible to put on a successful 10-point health information program consisting of:

Newspaper Publicity. The headlines necessarily were preoccupied by the Korean war, but the two daily newspapers were liberal in their allotment of space to Fall Fly Week. They published 26 stories, 11 pictures, and 2 editorials, totaling 334 column inches. Suburban weeklies also covered the Week.

Radio Coverage. All five Charleston radio stations featured fly control activities regularly on their news programs for 2 weeks before, and during, Fall Fly Week. They carried, as a public service, regular 15-second announcements. The largest station devoted a sponsored 15-minute program to an interview with the State Health Commissioner.

"Come Out and See" Demonstrations. As the sanitary landfill is an integral part of the fly control program, it was decided to publicize it during Fall Fly Week. A permanent sign was erected at the site. A daily demonstration was arranged for health department staff, the local medical society, the board of health, civic groups, PTAs, and others. The demonstrations were transferred to the health department when rain made it impossible to hold them outdoors.

"Street Theaters." One might call them window displays, but when advertised as "Street Theaters," thousands came to see them.

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One featured "The World's Largest Fly," a \$5,000 model loaned by the Boston Museum of Science. It was on exhibit in a men's clothing store window.

Two other street theaters featured continuous motion pictures of fly biology and sanitation. The projection machines were placed in the doorways of department stores.

School Booklets. On the first day of Fall Fly Week teachers distributed two specially prepared booklets.

"The Fly" a 12-page illustrated leaflet in rhyme, carried to 10,000 grammar school pupils the story of how flies spread disease.

"Fly News," a more mature leaflet stressing the importance of sanitation in fly control, was distributed to 4,000 high school students.

Clubs. One thousand copies of "Fly News" were distributed at the weekly luncheon meetings of the city's six civic clubs — the American Business Club, Civitan, Exchange, Kiwanis, Lions, and Rotary.

Guest of Honor. Charleston's guest of honor for Fall Fly Week was the Deputy Surgeon General. His presence was legitimate news. His visit held an important value, in addition, in internal public relations. He met personally every member of the fly control staff. In a speech to them he pointed out that they constitute a team doing a job which is being watched by public health people all over the country.

Public Appearance by the Guest of Honor. The Deputy Surgeon General spoke before the Charleston Civitan Club, delivering a message about fly control and public health to 150 leading business and professional men.

State-wide Meeting of City Officials. The mayor of Charleston became so interested in Fall Fly Week that he called a special meeting of the West Virginia League of Municipalities to talk about fly control. A total of 25 mayors and city managers of 15 cities visited the sanitary landfill, studied the fly control project, and met with the Deputy Surgeon General to talk about public health.

Miscellaneous Activities. Public health workers from surrounding States visited Charleston during Fall Fly Week in search of ideas for publicizing fly control in other communities.

The PTA agreed to present fly control programs at its meetings during the winter; the mayor officially proclaimed Fall Fly Week; the Chamber of Commerce sent out a notice of the Week's activities to its members; and the weekly tourist bulletin told visitors where to go and what to see during the week.

ADAPTABLE PLAN

The 10-point plan for *Musca publicica*, publiciz-

ing the fly, could be adapted by any local health department anywhere. Aside from the salaries of the staff, who already were employed, and mimeograph paper, which already was on hand, Fall Fly Week cost the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department only \$249.74.

A little more than \$200 was for printing the school booklets. Mimeographing or photo-offsetting would have reduced the printing bill materially. The remainder was the expense of borrowing "The World's Largest Fly." Another type of window display might have been substituted.

As with all "firsts," Fall Fly Week produced useful lessons. None of the 10 points was a failure, but all of them might have been made more effective. The radio stations, for example, would have used more interviews and dramatic programs if staff had been available to write them. Had planning begun sooner, even the limited staff available might have written this material.

The movie machines proved too large to fit into store windows. Ideally, they should be used as part of an exhibit at, say, a fair.

The school booklets should have been distributed as a supplement to a motion picture or other type of program for school assemblies.

In other situations the Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Boy Scouts, church groups, and women's clubs might be enlisted for specific duties in connection with a fly week. If the budget permits, outdoor advertising, trailers in the movie theaters, banners across the streets, posters on every utility post are some of the media which could be used to call attention to even the soberest of subjects.

Although only a few of the possibilities were tried in Charleston, it was possible to retell an old story dramatically by using ingenuity, originality, and imagination.

Fall Fly Week there was tagged "the world's first." The regular landfill operation became something special when it was labelled a "Come Out and See" demonstration. Continuous movie machines attracted the curious when they were advertised as "Street Theaters."

Fall Fly Week succeeded because it had imagination. It had definite objectives. It was timed to take place when needed most to boost the program. It was carried out vigorously. It was followed up by even more publicity hammering away at the theme that sanitation, the best means of fly control, must go on and on and on.

Spring 1951 should see local health departments all over the country sponsoring Fly Weeks. In some cities the occasion will be coupled with Spring Clean-up or Health Week. But in all cases the objective will be the same: to seek a healthier, more fly-free community.