

# Use of Advisory Committees in Environmental Health

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**B**USINESS and labor leaders who participate in environmental health advisory committees soon recognize that good health practices are "good business." Health administrators who continue to work with advisory committees realize that their programs, policies, and regulations are more likely to be accepted and followed when developed with the advice and experience of those who are expected to comply. Furthermore, when a proposed program has been planned with the groups that would be affected and therefore has their support, the program has a greatly increased chance of meeting the approval of governing bodies and budget makers.

## *Food Sanitation*

Use of advisory committees in the environmental health program in Los Angeles began with the organization of the food sanitation advisory committee 17 years ago. Numerous groups concerned with the production, processing, storage, transportation, serving, and sale of food are represented on the committee. Representatives of the food, dairy, meat, fish, and poultry industries include trade association executives, labor officials, the trade press, equipment dealers, utility representatives, food distribution vehicle owners, and others. The committee meets every month except during the summer. The health officer, board of health commissioners, and city council never consider

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any new policy, regulation, ordinance, or program affecting the food industry without asking, "What does the food sanitation advisory committee say about this?" Among the accomplishments of the committee are:

1. Development of a comprehensive food sanitation code covering all types of food establishments.
2. Development of sections of the building, plumbing, electrical, and ventilation codes of the building department which require that new food establishment construction meet standards necessary for sanitary maintenance and operation.
3. Support of a requirement that equipment and method of installation be approved by the health department before a food establishment is built or remodeled.
4. Support of foodhandler training programs for management.
5. Development of the concept that management should assume its share of responsibility for day-to-day operations relating to health protection and food poisoning prevention.

## *Cross-Connection Control*

There are 6,700 devices installed in industrial plants, harbor docks, oil fields, and laboratories in Los Angeles to prevent backflow of contaminated or toxic substances into city waterlines. A dozen years ago, tests of these devices by the Cross-Connection Foundation of the University of Southern California showed that a substantial number were not functioning properly. A regular program of testing and maintenance was indicated. An advisory committee was organized with representation from the industrial committee of the chamber of commerce,

the plumbing industry, manufacturers of backflow prevention devices, and representatives of the city departments of water and power, and building and safety.

Initially, consideration was given to employment of city inspectors to test regularly all devices, with an annual permit fee to cover cost of service. The committee settled, however, on a recommendation for certifying qualified plumbers and others, who would be employed by property owners to maintain and report on all backflow prevention devices on their premises. This led to adoption of a regulation requiring all devices to be tested annually by certified testers. Night courses, covering both theory and practice, were organized at Trade Technical Junior College and are given each semester. For teaching and performance testing, all types of backflow prevention devices were provided and installed at the school by industry. Sanitary engineers of the department of water and power and the health department alternate as class instructors. Successful completion of performance tests at the school and a written examination given by the health department entitles plumbers and qualified maintenance men to become "certified backflow preventer testers"; 460 testers have been certified.

### *Occupational Health*

A comprehensive survey of the metal-finishing industry revealed some exemplary installations as well as others with hazardous conditions. Leaders in this industry were appointed by the board of health commissioners to a metal finishing advisory committee. This committee, working through a series of subcommittees, recommended detailed standards for degreasing, spray painting, plating, and other processes. A comprehensive set of industrial hygiene regulations covering this industry was, upon advice of the committee and health officer, adopted by the board of health commissioners. Conflict with State regulations was avoided through participation of a representative of the State division of industrial safety. He subsequently reported to the committee that the rules could serve as a guide to their staff on a statewide basis.

Committee participants sought assurance that

the health department would provide adequate staff to enforce the rules. Since the city operates on a fee-for-service basis, it is very likely that the department will recommend inspection fees to provide the additional personnel and equipment necessary to adequately enforce these new rules. A similar set of standards were subsequently developed through a chemical, petroleum, and rubber industry advisory committee.

### *Ionizing Radiation Control*

Official delegates of the medical and dental societies, health physicists, and equipment manufacturers agreed to serve on a Los Angeles radiological advisory committee. The group recommended legislation to control all "unintentional radiation" and generally to require conformance with national radiation protection guides. Not only did the group help develop the regulations, but they also supported the concept that fees for service should provide \$40,000 a year to pay for the staff and equipment. These funds permitted the department to insert lead collimating washers and aluminum filtering disks in all dental units needing them. Exposure to ionizing radiation in dental offices was reduced an estimated 60 percent by the various steps authorized by the regulations. Medical and industrial X-ray units were modified as needed. Installations using radioisotopes were checked for safe practices.

The official spokesmen on the committee for the medical and dental societies later worked with the city environmental health director on a statement presented to the State legislature's public health and welfare committee, which considered statewide requirements. To the surprise of members of the assembly's interim committee, the representatives of the professional groups said that their members favored inspection of facilities in their professional offices to require elimination of all unintentional ionizing radiation.

### *Swimming Pools*

About 15 years ago swimming pool contractors complained that health department approval of swimming pool plans meant little because no inspections were made during construction to assure conformance with such plans. This situation, they said, was conducive to com-

petition that forced contractors to "cut corners" or go out of business.

These complaints led to the organizing of an advisory committee of pool builders, designers, and equipment manufacturers which developed detailed rules and regulations and supported a plan for health department supervision of the sanitary and safe construction of swimming pools. Work with this committee resulted in official recognition of skimmers in lieu of overflow gutters on moderate-sized semipublic pools, approval of new type filters, and adoption of a formal program of fees for review of equipment such as filters, rate of flow indicators, chlorinators, and similar appurtenances. This program, coupled with work with the National Swimming Pool Institute, led to a National Sanitation Foundation program of national swimming pool equipment standards.

There are 2,000 semipublic swimming pools in the city and tens of thousands of private pools. Regulation by periodic inspection of every pool is impossible because of lack of manpower. A study showed 85 percent of the public pools and a large proportion of the private pools are being maintained by swimming pool service companies. To improve the quality of maintenance, the health department organized inservice training programs for pool maintenance specialists. A special swimming pool service company advisory committee was organized which requested a formal program for accreditation of maintenance technicians. An ordinance was drafted and subsequently adopted requiring all swimming pool service technicians to take a written and performance examination given by the health department to show they understand the theory and principles of pool operation. The department's sanitary engineering director organized evening courses which are attended by a hundred or more swimming pool service men per semester; more than 400 are now "certified." The cost of the program is covered by fees for the examination and an annual fee for administration and supervision of the program.

### *Subdivisions*

A subdividers advisory committee composed of land developers, engineers, and surveyors assisted in developing procedures for review of

unsewered subdivisions. This led to support for requiring community sewers except where conditions are truly favorable for septic tank systems. The committee supported a program worked out with the president of the department of public works, the city engineer, the city attorney, and the health department to establish an acreage fee for all undeveloped land, which would provide a revolving fund for building off-site sewers to serve new subdivisions. This program now provides more than \$1 million a year in revenue for sewer extensions and is greatly reducing pressures on the department to authorize unsewered subdivisions. It avoids the double cost of building septic tank systems and later ripping up the streets and lawns to install public sewers.

### *Mobilehomes*

Work over a period of years with operators of mobilehome parks and builders of mobilehomes resulted in the health department retaining its responsibilities in the important environmental health program of regulating this type of housing. When an ordinance was proposed which would have transferred this whole function to the building department, the mobilehomes association fully supported the position that the health department should continue to be responsible for all matters relating to occupancy, use, sanitation, and maintenance of mobilehome parks. Again, when the State law was amended in 1961 to provide for the State to take over this responsibility unless the local governing body formally votes to accept the function, the mobilehome park association officers appeared before the city council's public health and welfare committee to recommend that the local health department retain the responsibility.

A recent survey of mobilehome parks showed which items of the new State law are most commonly violated. These data are being organized for presentation to the mobilehome park advisory committee so that procedures for improving compliance can be developed.

### **Guidelines**

We have observed in our work with advisory committees that certain practices will contribute to fruitful committee work and others will de-

tract from it. The following are some guidelines we try to keep in mind:

In selecting committee members, we try to consult with leaders in each of the fields to be represented so that those invited are the spokesmen of representative groups, societies, or organizations.

Members are appointed through formal letters from the health officer, board of health, mayor, or other top official.

The chairman and vice chairman are selected by the committee staff and the conduct of the meeting left to them.

Before calling a meeting, specific, substantial topics are selected and thorough staff work is done. Before the meeting, the members are provided with background information and a written statement of the proposed policy, ordinance, regulation, or program to be considered. It is made clear that the proposals are subject to major revision.

It is vital that the health department staff refrain from going into an advisory committee meeting with a strong feeling of pride of authorship for a proposal. We don't attempt to "sell" a draft. We seek advice and try to accept constructive criticism cheerfully.

We encourage the formation of subcommittees to consider technical matters in depth, to try out proposals in actual practice, and to bring in technical and specialist advisers.

As many of the presentations and explanations as possible should be made by committee members, not health department staff. Committee members are given all the help, advice, and props they request.

We don't expect committee members to come to important decisions on new topics at the first meeting. They are encouraged to go back to their sponsoring groups to review proposals and seek advice or authorization for their vote of approval or disapproval.

The health department staff should fully understand and support the advisory commit-

tee program. Proposals should be reviewed with all staff members concerned with the subject before being submitted to advisory committees. We encourage participation or active leadership by these staff members; however, staff members should not outnumber industry representatives at meetings.

Direct and active participation by the health officer, the board of health, and the local governing body or mayor is desirable at important meetings or functions of advisory groups.

Full recognition of each committee member is essential to full participation. The chairman makes individual introductions or calls for self-introductions. Names and affiliations of those attending are included in committee minutes, and individuals are given credit for important suggestions in the minutes, news reports, and trade journal releases.

All minutes, invitations, and announcements are signed and presented by the chairman of the committee or subcommittee, not by health department staff.

Minutes of the meetings are prepared so that they can be printed without editing in the trade and union publications. Special releases are provided for trade journals when requested.

Services are provided for the convenience of members: telephone calls to remind them of meetings, adequate parking facilities, and convenient meeting places and times.

Committee members receive letters of thanks or other tokens of recognition for a particular job that was well done or for an extended period of good service.

Advisory committees have become a valuable part of the environmental health program in Los Angeles. This was evident at a ceremony in 1958 when 200 advisory committee members shared with city officials the honor of accepting the Samuel J. Crumbine Award "for outstanding achievement in the development of a comprehensive program of environmental sanitation."