

I. Situation Review

The three major eruptions of Mount St. Helens have deposited moderate to light amounts of ash on Oregon. The effect of the ash goes beyond its physical presence, creating a number of perceptual problems:

- media reports, particularly in the eastern press, have created an image of Oregon as disaster-ridden, once beautiful but now unlivable area. The more responsible articles factually point out that Oregon may in the future have a number of economic and livability problems. Although factual, Oregon's image is nevertheless nicked.
- there's simply no telling how long we will continue to be affected by ashfall. The worst geologic scenarios indicate a period of several decades. It is possible too that we've seen all we will see.
- because of the uncertainty of future ashfall, the livability of Oregon in the future has been called into question.
- also, because of the uncertainty of future ashfall, businesses considering expansion or relocation to Oregon are now taking a hard second look.
- Oregon residents are questioning their own future and ability to cope. The remark, "If this keeps up, I'm moving.", is common. Oregonians may be required to learn and develop new systems for dealing with ash.

- the clearing of ash by city and state institutions has created a financial burden, a concern to taxpayers who wonder how we'll pay for ash removal if it becomes a way of life.
- tourists tend to visit the Pacific Northwest as a whole, rather than specific states or cities. Because this is particularly true of Oregon, what happens in another state directly affects tourism in Oregon. Traveler uncertainty fears about what will be encountered has already resulted in decreases in tourism levels. Of 29 Portland properties contacted this week, some 47 group cancellations have been reported.
- Oregon ports have lost business, not just due to blockage of the Columbia, but due to the perception of shippers that these ports may no longer be as desirable as they once were.
- the request to declare Oregon a disaster area, a very necessary move, reinforces perceptions inside and outside the state that we have a very serious, potentially unmanageable problem.

The bottom line to Oregon's ash problem is that our worst enemy is the perception created in the minds of the rest of the world.

Our position: Ash is a fact and a problem, but it's not a serious problem. It can easily be lived with and should not significantly detract from the state's many other benefits. The question now is, how do we communicate that?

Following is the outline of a suggested approach to correct misperceptions. The plan emphasizes a "self-help" attitude:

II. Desired Results

1. Real estate values
2. Measures of public perception (polling)
 - Control
 - Livability
 - Traveler destination
 - Citizen reassurance
3. Visible citizen involvement/volunteerism
4. Retain existing businesses
5. Clear role of government as a helper
6. Remain attractive to new businesses, expansion of existing business
7. Central source of credible (timely, candid, accurate) information.

III. Implementing the Plan

Short term activities to be accomplished within two months:

- A business/government council to direct efforts will be operable in one month.
- Certain immediate steps will be taken.
- A work plan will be developed, based on input from council task forces and possible professional assistance.
- An appropriate budget will be determined, based on government and business community financing, in order to carry out the work plan.

- A staff group will be formed of an appropriate size, consisting of loaned executives from government and the business community, to assist in developing and carrying out work plan.
- Benchmark measures of public(s) perceptions will be made.

Long Term results (Phase II) to be accomplished beyond two months:

- Implementation of work plan, which will emphasize continuing communication with various publics to alter perceptions.
- Significant improvement will be made in the measures of public perception.

IV. Immediate Activities - Recommendations

1. Develop Position/Message and Fact Package

Consideration should be given to immediate development of a message or "position" concerning ashfall in Oregon.

Possible elements of the message are:

- The ashfall problem in Oregon has been overstated. It is a problem and a nuisance, but is simply a new development in our environment with which we can easily cope.
- Oregon continues to retain its many benefits and high livability, and expects to do so despite the future probability of ashfall.
- The citizens of Oregon are resilient and will adapt, developing the necessary methods to deal with future ashfall.
- Develop "fact package" - used for variety of purposes.

Time: Within one week.

Responsibility: Initial Task Force, in cooperation with Governor's office.

2. Communicate with Media

Mount St. Helens is a story that the mass media unintentionally has a tendency to over-exaggerate. It is recommended that the

media be contacted by appropriate persons representing Oregon in order to urge them to carefully review their stories for accuracy of facts and impressions left.

Time: Within two weeks.

Responsibility: Task Force to draw up list and identify contacts. Governor's office to select and initiate.

V. Phase Two (First Two Months) Activities - Recommendations

1. Formation of Business/Government Council

A Council should be formed to assist and advise the Governor in dealing with the effects of ashfall.

A commission, composed of 5-7 business and government leaders to act as a steering committee for all efforts. The commission is appointed by and reports to the Governor;

A council, composed of as many as 100 governmental and industry leaders in specific areas. The council in total is made up of task forces, which are "doer" groups who will examine the problems in their specific areas and develop an immediate plan of action to be carried out by members of their industry. Their recommendations comprise the total "work" plan. The commission's staff would assist the task forces by making available resources.

Other responsibilities of the commission are to:

- raise necessary private sector funds;
- formalize a specific plan of activities;
- determine and allocate financial and loaned executive resources;
- manage the program;
- set specific objectives.

Task forces suggested at present:

- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Lumber
- Transportation
- Retail
- Manufacturing (Electronic)
- Industrial Development
- International

The Governor, the commission and its council would, thus, provide the unified voice and action groups to combat ashfall in Oregon.

2. Work Plan

A comprehensive plan should be developed based on recommendations of the council, its task forces, and its staff. Further, it is likely that professional public relations counsel should be sought in development of the plan. The purpose of this plan is to ensure coordination, maintenance of a positive theme, and the stating of

measurable objectives to track performance.

3. Altering Perceptions

The key element of this entire attempt is to change the perceptions of significant publics regarding their view of the effect on Oregon of ashfall. It is recommended that early thought be given to developing research data to benchmark the level of these publics' attitudes. The commissions should then develop objectives for improvements to be made in these levels. This will be the yardstick of success for the entire program.

4. Advertising Campaign

It is likely that an advertising campaign will be necessary as one tool in altering perceptions. It is suggested the bulk of funding be dedicated to this purpose.

5. Developing Financial Resources

The commission should early consider the development of funding for this effort. Certain governmental monies appear to be available; the business community should attempt to match this amount. The primary use of the money collected would be to finance promotional advertising.

6. Developing Personnel Resources

A full-time staff of at least two persons should be established for approximately six months. To the extent possible, qualified loaned executives should be sought from government and business. If necessary, professional help would be hired. The staff would work with task forces to implement their recommendations and assist the commission in its management of the entire effort. It is

expected that this staff would perform certain "contact" responsibilities in working with the public, e.g., trade associations, speeches, etc.

7. Council Meeting

At the conclusion of the first two months, the Governor should consider calling together a luncheon meeting of the entire council. He would report on the Council's progress as a whole, emphasizing that the state is promoting its benefits and is actively learning how to cope with this change in environment. He would also emphasize the cooperation between government and private industry as evidenced by the work of the task forces. The council itself is evidence that the state has met this new challenge - as it has many in the past - and continues to be the most livable state in the nation. The meeting would provide an opportunity for the positive airing of our position. Further, this meeting will give evidence to the public that the state's leadership is in control of the situation, if not the mountain.

VI. Phase Three (Two Months+) Activities - Recommendations

1. Carrying Out Formal Plan

The council luncheon marks the completion of short-term activities. From that point on, the council will carry out its planned activities through its task forces and its staff.

It would appear very necessary that measurable objectives be established to mark the council's progress.

2. Self-Destruct at Six Months

It is recommended that the council consider dissolution at the end of six months. On-going programs, advertising campaigns, etc., may need to be lodged with various groups best equipped to handle their management on a long-term basis. The task forces will carry on the council's work as part of their own industry activities. If, on the other hand, conditions warrant, the council would be continued.

3. Continued Perception Research

Periodic research is recommended to evaluate progress in changing perceptions about Oregon's ashfall situation. The research would be used to measure the success of various task force activities.