

EDITORIAL PAGE

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PLANNING -AN ESSENTIAL TOOL

The necessity for understanding and practicing comprehensive environmental health planning is no longer a matter of dispute. Planning is essential to effective programming, problem solution, and attainment of objectives.

Environmental health programs at all levels of government face budgetary limitations. Only through rational planning can program priorities be determined so as to solve the most important problems as rapidly and economically as possible. And increasingly, environmental health planning is being mandated by a large number of federal, state and local program funding mechanisms.

The 1976 Samuel J. Crumbine Award Jury, while reviewing applications for this year's Crumbine Consumer Protection Award, found that many environmental health agencies do in fact have effective planning components. The Jury found that such agencies effectively articulate the different steps and components of their planning. This year's Crumbine Award was based on:

- 1) A brief statement of the program's goal (that is, the ultimate desired condition).
- 2) Documentation of the agency's mission in developing the program ("mission" being a statement of the advocacy position of the agency and/or a statement of the clientele or public to be served).
- 3) A definition or description of the food protection problem within the jurisdiction of the agency (with appropriate substantiation or data base).
- 4) A realistic ranking of the food protection problem, showing its relative priority compared to other environmental and public health problems faced by the agency ("problem" meaning a reasonably discrete environmental issue having an impact on human health, safety, comfort, or well-being).

5) A description of the method or system used by the agency to determine the priorities of various problems.

6) A discussion of the problem solving methods used in the food protection program, including such activities as public information, consultation, management certification, official inspections, sampling, analysis, consumer participation, enforcement, training, permits, placarding, demonstrations and others. (The term "program" indicates a rational grouping of activities designed to solve one or more environmental health problems.

7) Reference to other environmental problems which are addressed by the food protection program. These might include environmental chemicals, environmental injuries, solid wastes, water supply, liquid waste disposal, air pollution control, and insect and rodent control.

8) A discussion of the program tools and resources both needed by the agency and available to it (the terminology "tools and resources" covers such matters as manpower, equipment, physical facilities, laboratory support, legislation, and budgets needed to implement the program).

9) A clear delineation of food protection objectives (an "objective" indicates a specified amount of progress toward the program goal within a specified period of time.)

10) A description of the evaluation technique used to judge the effectiveness of the food protection program in terms of the attainment of program objectives, and a summary of the evaluation.

Environmental health planning, to be effective, must address the reasonably comprehensive spectrum of environmental problems. The minimal list of such environmental problems must include water pollution air pollution, food safety, solid wastes, radiation, noise pollution, shelter, environmental injuries, biological insults, and environmental chemicals. Without addressing a spectrum such as the foregoing, the planning priorities will be incomplete and misleading, and the planning process will be ineffective, if not self-destructive.

There must also be absolute agreement that environmental health planning requires a separate prioritizing system from problems of personal health, health care, or "sickness treatment." When attempts are made to include all in the same prioritizing system or list,

environmental health and other preventive programs always suffer when balanced against the overwhelming and immediate impact of problems involved in curative programs.

And lastly, environmental health planning must be based on long term concerns and goals if we are to gain or regain a semblance of a quality environment in this nation and in the World. Environmental health planning must clearly consider "the greatest good for the largest number over the longest period of time."