

PUBLIC INFORMATION

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[Editors Note—The following comments preceded a question and answer session conducted by Terri Lynn Johnson, Sherry Kalan, and Janet Preston of the Public Information Office.]

CONCERN SHOWS

Yesterday many of you heard Jim Foley, director of the Office of Highway Safety, FHWA, say that as professional highway builders “our concern shows.” This concern, he went on to say, is better than the most expensive public relations program.

What Mr. Foley didn’t elaborate on was that letting the public know our concern is a major public relations program, but it doesn’t have to be an expensive one.

Each of us here, in fact all 5,000 or so state highway employees, are actually functioning every day as a public relations person. The public relations job we do can make a big difference—it can effect funding decisions by the legislature; it can effect the lobbying effort of a garden club who wants to save the old oak tree, or it can effect a driver’s attitude and even save a life.

All of us, on-and-off duty, meet with strangers and friends and reflect our own attitudes and concerns. The face-to-face and telephone contacts we have each day form the basis for the public’s view of the Indiana State Highway Commission. What is our job, then, if you are all public relations people?

MAJOR RESPONSIBILITIES OF PIO (PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS)

Our duties are many and I don’t have time to go into them all today, but a major responsibility of all we do is to reinforce the good image you all project. Some other activities include:

- about two news releases a day
- telephone inquiries—150 per week
- map requests and directions
- letters

coordinate detours
 speeches
 slide shows
 pamphlets
 state fair/farm progress shows
 speaking
 media inquiries
 press conferences
 charts
 National Transportation Week

Other responsibilities include keeping the other professionals in highway—you planners, designers, builders, testers, engineers of every specialty—free to do your job. We can find out information from you and pass it on to 150 legislators, 560 media and other agencies, and the general public. While many of you still get calls and letters, we are routing many of those to the right place, too.

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

All this is fine—right—but what do you say to the irate caller who just lost his foreign car in a chuckhole? First, remember the “golden rule.” It applies here too.

If it had been your car, what attitude would you like projected from highway personnel? That’s right—be courteous, polite, and responsive. Get all the facts, no matter what the complaint or transfer him to the Office of Public Information (5637) or handle it yourself but FOLLOW-UP or if all else fails—suggest politely he buy American!

TELEPHONE COURTESY

Remember—telephone courtesy requires you to identify yourself (and this includes calling within highway—don’t make secretaries ask). Also—talk only in your area of expertise. Never project the future.

This information applies to media calls also—the PIO is here to handle them *but* if they do call you directly—the same guidelines apply.

If the media does call you, call the PIO *as soon as possible* and let them know who called and basically what information you gave them.





