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A REAL NEED

The forest products industry is under attack! This is no surprise to anyone in any sector of the industry. Efforts mounted over the past two decades have been effective in casting our industry as environmental bad guys and irresponsible pillagers of the forest. The success of these attacks has made much of the traditional timber base unavailable to forest products companies. Many changes brought about by these pressures have been ones needed in the industry. External pressures often speed changes that self-examination is slow to recognize. The pendulum, however, as often happens, has swung too far. Public perception now seems to closely parallel environmental group positions that the only good use of wood and forests is to never cut another tree for any reason.

After spending 15 years in the chemical industry, I see some parallels. For many years the industry has been seen as dismissive and defensive by environmentalists and the public. An industry umbrella organization, The Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA), instituted a program titled "Responsible Care." The aim was to improve environmental compliance and safe use of products. Things have changed and will continue to do so, reported J. Roger Hirl, president and CEO of Occidental Chemical Corporation, during the

industry's annual Pittsburgh Chemical Day on May 5, 1998. "We opened ourselves up to the public and made a commitment to literally 'clean up our act.'"

The wood products industry seems at a loss as to what to do about the position we find ourselves in. Perhaps we can learn something about unity as embodied by the CMA. I think the key here is industry unity. An organization that truly represents the entire forest products industry needs to take the message to the public that we are the good guys. We have a great environmental story to tell. This needs to be promoted as strongly as the oppositions' view. Note the advertising effort by the steel industry of late. Even they imply that the use of wood is not environmentally sound. As we in the industry know, nothing is farther from the truth. The "Wood Works" environmental communications program by the Wood Products Promotion Council was a great effort. Sadly it has come to an end. Who will now take up the torch? Should it be the WPPC again or the American Wood Council of AF&PA? Any thoughts?

DARYLE LAYTON

*Timber and Wood R&D
Boise Cascade Corp.*