

HOT TOPICS

The Missoula vote: How public opinion was changed

For a classic case of manipulating the public opinion, the industry needs look no further back than last November's election.

WASHINGTON—When the college town of Missoula, Mont. defeated a local lawn pesticide bill 57 to 43 percent last November, it became a classic case of how public opinion can be changed through an informational, educational campaign.

Initial pre-vote research indicated that the townspeople were inclined to pass the measure, which would have made the homeowner responsible for posting after pesticide applications. The odds favored the ordinance 58 to 37 percent, with 5 percent undecided.

Prior to the election, a public education program was instituted by a coalition that consisted of the Coalition for a Sensible Pesticide Policy (CSPP), Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) and a local yard and garden group.

The campaign—Here are the components of that campaign:

✓ **Television spots:** A 30-second television commercial featured an elderly neighbor-type receiving a citation from a police officer. It brought home the "Big Brother is watching" concept used in other campaign components.

✓ **Radio spots:** Three radio spots were aired. One called the measure unnecessary and expensive; another said that neighbors don't have to be forced to communicate; and the third said that Missoulians "need a greener, friendlier Missoula, not more Big Brother."

Missoula voters polled:

What was the main reason for your vote against the local pesticide law?

too much govt. control.....23%
unnecessary.....16%

What was the main reason for your vote for the local pesticide law?

to notify people with kids & pets.....17%
community right-to-know.....14%
reasonable request.....11%

Were you aware of the ad/publicity campaign against the local pesticide law?

yes.....81%
no.....17%
not sure.....2%

What type of advertising do you remember?

television.....63%
newspaper.....9%
direct mail.....7%
radio.....3%

✓ **Newspaper:** An advertising insert featured a quote from former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, explaining that pesticides are heavily tested and are of low risk when used as labels direct.

✓ **Direct mail:** Lawn care customers, who are generally aware of the benefits of lawn care pesticides, received a flyer discussing the ordinance's various defects.

✓ **Tele-solicitation:** A phone bank placed calls to voters for the two days prior to the election, reminding them of the information they had seen and heard, and urging them to get out and vote the measure down.

✓ **Corporate:** Washington Corporations, one of the area's largest employers, routed a memo to its employees informing them of the ordinance's shortcomings and urging them to vote against it.

Final results—The ordinance's defeat reflected a nearly 20 percent turnaround in voters' views.

A post-election survey (see chart) indicated that many voters were confused by the ordinance. Although ordinance supporters complained that advertising led people to believe the measure would ban pesticide use, the survey found that most were aware this was not the case.

INSIDE

**A damper on
golf building,
page 86**

**Eight new
bent varieties,
page 88**

**Landscaping
for value,
page 88**