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**PRESS & TELEVISION**

Levy contend. Ordinary folk have "licensed" journalists to decide what is important and to explain it clearly. But newsmen incorrectly assume that their easily distracted audience follows the news as intently as they do, and that readers and TV viewers become bored with a continuing story when editors do. Journalists should try to understand their audience better—friends and colleagues are bad gauges—and learn what people need or want to know and how to convey it.

Simply putting a story on page one for a few days, the authors say, is not all that the press can do to assure that the news gets through.

### *Congratulations For Nothing*

"Covering the EPA, or, Wake me up if anything happens" by R. Jeffrey Smith, in *The Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept.-Oct. 1983), 200 Alton Pl., Marion, Ohio 43302.

One morning last March, a *Washington Post* headline announced: EPA FIASCO: THE SYSTEM WORKS! The "system" was the check on bureaucratic malfeasance imposed by a vigilant press. But Smith, a *Science* magazine writer, doubts that such journalistic self-congratulations are in order.

Actually, he argues, reporters (especially those in Washington) ignored red flags at the Environmental Protection Agency for two years—signs of the questionable ties between its top officials and business and of lax enforcement of rules that ultimately led to wholesale firings and resignations. In 1981, for example, EPA administrator Anne Burford barred the agency's regional offices from citing manufacturers for violations of hazardous waste disposal regulations—a signal that she was trying to cut back on the number of citations. Not until February 1983 did reporters pay attention to Burford's October 1982 refusal to hand over documents to a House committee investigating EPA's performance in regulating disposal of hazardous materials in landfills.

About 20 Washington reporters cover the EPA more or less regularly, Smith notes, but their job is complex. No single reporter can grasp all the details in the fields—pesticides, air and water pollution—that the agency regulates. As a result, coverage has been superficial.

In October 1981, the CBS *Evening News* reported that Burford planned to cut EPA's budget, but it treated the news strictly as a political story, noting only that some congressmen feared the agency would be "gutted." Viewers never learned what regulations or research might be sacrificed. Reporters did no better once the Burford scandal surfaced last March, thanks to persistent congressional investigation. "Pack journalism" quickly set in, says Smith, as newsmen scrambled to record the charges and countercharges of EPA's congressional critics and the agency's top officials. Solid evidence, although available, was slow to appear.

"It takes energy and time," Smith concludes, "to reach deep into the federal bureaucracy and extract stories." In the EPA scandal, journalists did not try to reach very far.