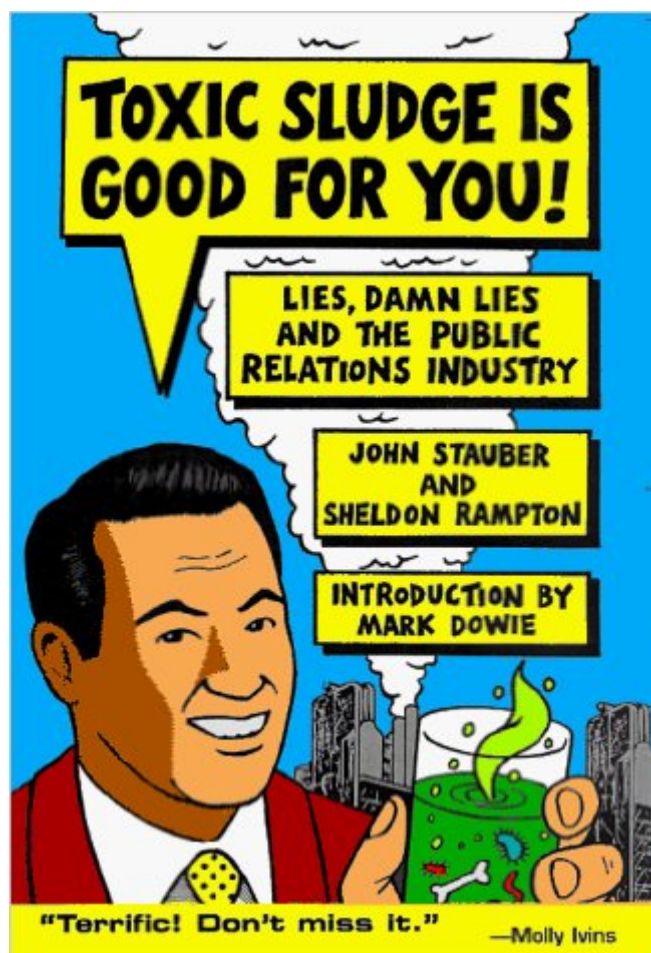


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Toxic Sludge Is Good For You: Lies, Damn Lies And The Public Relations Industry



Synopsis

Common Courage's number one seller blows the lid off of today's multi-billion-dollar propaganda-for-hire PR industry, revealing how public relations wizards concoct and spin the news, organize phony "grassroots" front groups, spy on citizens and conspire with lobbyists and politicians.

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Customer Reviews

Must reading for everyone. I bought a bunch of copies and am giving them as gifts to my friends. I used to wonder why I heard so much contradictory news in the major media pertaining to health and the environment. First, a news item quotes an authority saying a food is safe, the next year the same newspaper says it's dangerous, and the next year after that they claim it's good for you. After reading this book, I know why. There are thousands of environmental and health, and scientific organizations. According to this book, many (but not all) of these organizations are not much more than clever PR fronts, funded mainly by industry. For example, I have often seen and continue to see information provided by the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) in the major newspapers and magazines. The media usually takes this organization at its word as a credible scientific source. According to this book: The ACSH is an industry front group that produces PR ammunition for the food processing and chemical industries. They praise the nutritional values of fast food and receive money from the fast food industry. They claim pesticides are very safe and take money from a host of pesticide manufacturers. The list goes on and on.. Yet the journalists

usually take the ACSH words almost verbatim as fact and print it in their newspaper. Most journalists don't check their sources, or they're puppets of industry. Then the public reads this stuff as if it were scientifically proven fact. Public policy and law often gets decided on the basis of this "knowledge." Of course, some readers of these "facts" are skeptical, but no one seriously challenges the ACSH's credibility.

Where oh where do I begin? Toxic Sludge... takes a jaded look at the public relations industry, and exposes more than a few objectionable practices perpetrated on behalf of (mostly) corporate America's pursuit of the Almighty Buck. I say 'mostly' because, however distressing it may be to informed and intelligent citizenship, even the United States Government and more than a few foreign regimes solicit the services of these most nefarious snake oil salesmen. Let's face it, you really do not consume the services of PR firms in order to foster good relations with your customers, you go to them when you have done something bad, and you want it covered up, or at least 'spinned' in the 'right' direction. You solicit the help of PR flacks and keep them on juicy retainers in order to look good, and not to be good. When the doo-doo hits the fan, whose a corporate ne'er do well gonna call? The PR company, that's who. Toxic Sludge... contains twelve chapters of absorbing reading. From countermeasures directed at censoring information thoroughly in the public domain, keeping books off the bookshelves and dissenting voices from being heard, to infiltrating shoe-string activist organizations, fomenting criminal insurgency and subverting (and ultimately perverting) any and all attempts to relay the facts, the authors provide example after example of very well-financed government and corporate interests actively frustrating (and quite often foiling) intelligent and informed democratic participation in the political and economic process. As Mark Dowie, the author of the introduction says, in an environment rife with PR, facts can not survive, nor can the truth prevail.

John Stauber and Sheldon Rampton have set themselves a crucial task. As editors of the quarterly PR Watch, they regularly report on the often negative influence that the public relations industry has on the debate on public issues, especially PR firms' efforts on behalf of corporations which are battling public interest activists. This superb and concise book is largely based on that reporting. The ills documented in "Toxic Sludge is Good for You" are too numerous to give any kind of complete summary here--a few examples must stand for the whole:-One approach is the "divide and conquer" method of splitting a coalition of activists, by finding ways to buy some of them off. For example, Candy Lightner, the founder of MADD, was taken out of the fray when she became a lobbyist for the

American Beverage Institute.-Another fruitful method is the "astroturf" tactic, which involves the creation of a carefully controlled, phony grassroots group to front for corporate interests. An example is the "National Smokers Alliance," created by PR giants Burson-Marsteller on behalf of Philip Morris.-We also learn about attempts to cloud debate on scientific and technical issues. Many corporations have benefitted from the "expertise" of the American Council on Science and Health, a deceptively-named industry front group which can be counted on for pronouncements on the perfect safety of all sorts of chemicals and food additives, and on the nutritional benefits of eating fast food. Stauber and Rampton document a particularly duplicitous attempt by the ACSH to fudge cancer statistics and make it appear that cancer rates are falling, not rising.-Worst of all are the outright fabrications.

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