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BLAME ASSIGNMENT IN A DIFFUSE  
DISASTER SITUATION: THE ROLE OF  
AN EMERGENT CITIZEN GROUP\*

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## Introduction

It has been generally concluded that the amount of disaster research has grown rapidly if not exponentially during the last decade or so (Quarantelli and Dynes, 1977). One area neglected by disaster researchers during this time, even though a number of disaster studies looked at this phenomenon during the 1950's, is blame and scapegoating (Taylor, 1978:255). This neglect is rather surprising, since it appears that the process of assigning blame occurs after many disasters (however, see Fritz, 1957 or Fritz and Williams, 1957), and as Allport (1966:5) and Klapp (1972:191) observe, this process is an important part of everyday life.

This paper is an examination of how the blame process comes into existence through the interpretation of events by a local emergent citizens' group (ECG). Our data are derived from a nationwide project concerned with determining the characteristics, conditions, and consequences of ECG's. We conceptualize ECG's as consisting of private citizens who are informally or formally organized at the local community level to pursue either general or specific non-emergency kinds of goals with respect to actual or potential disasters. By disaster, we mean all actual or potential occurrences as defined by federal law, as well as marginal threats (e.g., hazardous wastes, severe pollution) which are so defined by the law. Data were gathered through various techniques. Over 20 interviews were conducted with salient and peripheral group members, public officials and government officials, members of the media, private citizens, and any other relevant persons or organizations that may have been involved with the ECG's studied in this paper. Private letters and memos, newspaper articles, and legal documents, along with field observations, were also utilized in the data analysis. To provide the promised confidentiality of personal identity, minor but not significant details about geographic matters have been altered, and pseudonyms have been given to the town and the individuals involved.

## An Overview of the Literature

In the social sciences, collective behavior and social psychology have been major sources for studying the blame process. The field of disaster studies has been another. The process of blame and scapegoating has been found to occur, for example, after a fire (Veltford and Lee, 1943), airplane crashes (Bucher, 1957), an explosion (Drabek, 1968; Drabek and Quarantelli, 1967), and a severe winter (Neal and Perry, 1980). These studies focus on how organizations blame specific individuals for the impact itself, or a perceived poor response to the disaster, or how individuals blame organizations for the impact itself or a perceived poor response to the disaster.

There have been a number of suggestions, most interrelated, explaining the blame process. One salient factor involves the violation of community standards; that is, if a person or group adopts a course of action after a disaster for their own benefit, as opposed to action directed toward the good of the community, it has been found that blame occurs (Fritz, 1957;

Form and Nosow, 1958; Neal and Perry, 1980). Also, if individuals with relevant responsibilities do not make any effort to prevent future disaster, they may be blamed (Bucher, 1957). Some also contend that blame may occur after technological disasters only (Bucher, 1957:468; Turner and Killian, 1972:98), or if blame occurs after a natural disaster, causation is interpreted in various supernatural ways (Dynes and Yutzy, 1965). There are situations, however, where blame does occur after a natural disaster (Neal and Perry, 1980).

Personalization of blame, that is, indicating a specific person to be at fault, has been a common finding in disaster studies; a factor related to the political and legal structure of American society (Drabek and Quarantelli, 1967:12). It has also been found that organizations are blamed at times for consequences after a disaster, especially a natural one (Form and Nosow, 1958; Neal and Perry, 1980).

It can be assumed from a review of the studies that blaming after a disaster occurs when structural stress increases within a particular social setting. Klapp (1972:123) notes that within such a setting, people try to ascertain who or what is at fault during a complex situation. Of course, not everyone involved in a disaster places blame. Form and Nosow (1958:111) show that after a disaster, different groups of people have different perceptions and definitions of not only the situation, but what is needed to be accomplished in the situation.

We can conclude that a function of blame is to attempt to simplify and define the situation after a disaster, especially when someone or something is suspected of having been the cause of the event or having been responsible for unusual difficulty or severity during the disaster.

#### EKG's and Blame

One way people attempt to determine responsibility and to assign blame is to form an organized response to the disaster at hand. These groups not only point a finger at those perceived guilty, but later may also take action to mitigate future dangerous situations. In other words, one function of an EKG is to direct blame in a disaster situation.

The focus of this paper is to determine how groups such as EKG's are involved in the blame process. This perspective should add insight to what is known about blame and scapegoating. The process of determining blame within the group is analyzed, considering such factors as sources of information, the salience of group leaders and core members in defining the situation, and the relationship between the definition of a scapegoat and the formation of the group. The process of blame is also considered through time, while also taking note whether or not personalization of blame occurs, whether the focus of blame remains constant or changes, and whether or not placing blame eventually ceases.

## A Case Study

Pine Place is a small industrial city near a major metropolitan area. The area has a history of natural disasters, but most residents in the locality studied do not seem too concerned over these natural hazards. Rather, concern of potential disaster is directed toward a technological impact. One major concern of an ECG in Pine Place involves the severe air pollution and its possible health effects upon the community.

Since World War II, Pine Place has been a heavy industrial town involved in petrochemical production. For many years, the community was considered a company town because of the presence of a petroleum company's refinery. For the last 20 years, the city has had severe pollution problems due to the heavy and increasing industrialization of the area. Pro-industry city officials and even industry officials admit to this. However, until the emergence of the ECG we describe below, no apparent attempt had been made by citizens to ascertain possible health effects from the pollution and who might be contributing to the problem.

The precipitating event which eventually led to the emergence of an ECG appears to have been a newspaper story. This article appearing early one year noted that the regional Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had granted a local chemical company, the Chemical Destruction Inc. (CDI) a permit to burn polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB's). Grace Harry and Janice Benetar, two friends living in the same neighborhood, after separately reading the story, talked it over. In the next few days, they contacted about three dozen friends and neighbors (mostly housewives). Later in the week, a number of these persons met informally, first at Harry's and then Benetar's house, to discuss the granting of the permit to burn PCB's. One point that disturbed these people was that the EPA did not hold the required public meeting before issuing the permit. This group wanted to do something to prevent the incineration of PCB's. Contacts were made with local politicians, agencies, and another local ECG fighting a toxic waste site. It was concluded from making these contacts that the best way to exert any type of influence was to organize a group and begin a letter writing campaign to: 1) obtain the public hearing mandated by law, and 2) stop CDI from incinerating PCB's.

Within two months, this collection of housewives and neighbors formed a formal group giving themselves a name, electing officers, and establishing an informal division of labor. Other than a letter-writing campaign to obtain the EPA hearing, the major task at this time was to hold a protest march at the CDI gates on the date when the PCB burning was proposed to begin. It was at this time that CDI became the defined target of blame by the Pine Place ECG. Some of the reasons why the group decided to protest are illustrated by Benetar, the chairperson of the group:

Many of us neighbors have discussed this air pollution all the time. When the CDI permit became public, we felt like, "how much more are we going to sit out and accept this? We must speak out."

In addition, she added that "We didn't want to close down industry. The air pollution is bad enough, but the PCB's are more than we can tolerate."

Phone calls and donated printing services for flyers were utilized to publicize the protest scheduled for 8:00 a.m. at the plant's gates. On that morning, about 150 people showed up at the demonstration. Most were members of the ECG, their children and husbands (many of whom were blue-collar workers in the petrochemical industry), sympathetic observers, politicians, and interested bystanders. The media was also well-represented, with all local TV stations on hand, five local newspapers, and some local radio coverage. A number of protesters carried handmade signs with such phrases as "Don't make Pine Place the national dumping ground," "Love Canal, Three Mile Island, now Pine Place," and "Pine Place demands a public hearing." If the protest accomplished anything, it gave the group and the issue a great deal of public attention and brought forth a public controversy that exists today in Pine Place.

During the next two months, the group held two public meetings, the first with attendance of 150 people, the second with about 100 people. These meetings centered around CDI's burning of PCB's and the group's attempt to obtain a public hearing with EPA. In April, the public hearing was granted, and local citizens, including members of the ECG, were able to voice their objections about the issuing of the permit to CDI.

Needless to say, officials at CDI were surprised by all the commotion. Their perception was that they were doing nothing wrong and that no danger existed. A CDI official pointed out during this time that there were methods of getting rid of wastes more dangerous than incineration, such as landfills, and that their PCB incinerations were all well within EPA regulations. Another CDI executive felt that the company was being unfairly blamed, "We are absorbing the blows for every piece of malpractice and poor waste management that has happened everywhere. Almost every time someone smells an unpleasant odor, they say it's from CDI."

The Pine Place Chamber of Commerce has been a major supporter of CDI from the very beginning of the controversy. The Chamber of Commerce was quite upset over the protest at CDI, and the accompanying publicity. Since Pine Place's economy and a major portion of its growing tax base rely upon the expanding industrialization of the area, it is no surprise that the Chamber and other related groups quickly attempted to discredit the local ECG by implying that they were "radicals" and also "a group of emotional housewives trying to destroy the image of our pristine community." Both CDI's and the Chamber's attempts to counter the ECG's accusations and quiet the group failed. It is the consensus of those who are pro-CDI and pro-industry that CDI did not handle the situation well, especially the company's vice-president, Raymond Densmore.

Initially, Densmore was open and made many statements to the press. After a series of articles was later published by the major area newspaper pertaining to PCB's and linking them to CDI and potential health hazards in the area, Densmore and other company officials stopped making public statements. To many, including those supporting CDI, the failure to answer

publically gave the appearance of an admission of guilt.

Between March and November of that year, the citizens' group in Pine Place did have some personal contact with Densmore. Even though the group held a great deal of hostility toward the company, rarely was a negative comment made about Densmore, even to this day. Group members and others in the community have a very positive image of Densmore, characterized as a "very nice, polite man," the type of person with whom one could have an argument but who could be civil, if not charming, during a discussion of the PCB issue. Also, the reporter's description of Densmore in the controversial series of articles helped perpetuate his "good-guy" image:

His image is clean, clean. Clean shaven. Apple pie.  
All-American. Black tie. White shirt. Plaid slacks.  
University ring. A touch of country. Well fed. Double  
chin. Twinkling eyes. Loves to talk. Definite good  
old' boy.

The months of April and May were still times of intense media publicity regarding the local ECG's and CDI. During this time, the group discovered that a few years earlier, a state agency had filed suit against CDI for a number of violations including odors, spills, and very poor housekeeping at the incinerator. PCB's and other toxins were incinerated here for five years before it became illegal to incinerate PCB's. CDI settled the suit out of court. Such revelations added fuel to the burning issue, and lent a certain legitimacy to the group and its claims.

Through contacts with other ECG's in Arkansas and California, and the advice and aid of the metropolitan environmental umbrella group, the Pine Place group discovered other regulatory violations at other CDI waste disposal sites in two other states. This additional information increased the members' somewhat undefined fears at this time.

During this time period, CDI was also attempting to acquire permits for a landfill for industrial wastes in a small community located about 50 miles south of Pine Place. Another ECG subsequently formed in that small community, maintaining frequent contact with the Pine Place and other local ECG's. These contacts reinforced each group's growing negative perception of CDI. Eventually, CDI gave up trying to obtain the permits, due not to public pressure as they had announced, but to the astronomical costs for road improvements to maintain the heavy truck traffic carrying the wastes. The real reason was never publicly released.

At this time the group's perceptions of the air pollution situation were changing. Although CDI's various violations and the burning of PCB's were still a salient concern, alleged effects of the polluted air were becoming a public issue, as many residents of Pine Place reported that skin rashes were beginning to develop soon after CDI started its incineration of the PCB's. Increasing recognition of this new concern may be attributed to Lynne Slick, who was just joining the group. Although a new member, Slick had been following the PCB issue since its inception. Slick is a trained medical technician and, at the moment, is almost finished with her training to become a registered nurse. Her 22 year old daughter was supposedly

forced to leave Pine Place because the poor air quality had seriously affected her health. It should also be noted that among the core members of the Pine Place group, each reported at least one child suffering from skin rashes, respiratory problems, or epilepsy. The PCG issue, coupled with the addition of Slick's membership, influenced the development of the situation and the way in which the group started to redefine its future tasks. Other members of the group also had children whose illnesses were blamed on CDI's pollution; some of these families moved from Pine Place, and then relayed to other group members that they perceived their children's health improved.

The intensity of the attack on CDI by the local group (and vice versa) subsided during the summer, as the group directed its efforts to using the political system, including another letter-writing campaign, and numerous calls and trips to the state capitol to persuade legislators to prohibit the PCB burning.

In June, a junior executive of CDI contacted the group on his own initiative in an attempt to alleviate fears and to try to improve CDI's deteriorating public relations. In this case, the individual met with core group members not as a representative of CDI, but as a private citizen. Such actions, if discovered, might have cost him his job, but this was a matter of little concern to this individual. Like many others, he felt that the company was not approaching its problem with the public correctly, and that the company was failing to show that other methods of waste disposal were more dangerous. This contact did little to change the group's image of the company.

From its initiation, the group worked closely with one of their state legislators, Jim Krieger, who attempted to introduce legislation that summer to stop PCB incineration in the state. Due to the high degree of industrialization in the state, political circumstances prevented the bill from reaching a floor vote. Krieger also stimulated recognition of the health issue, long a concern of his. Before becoming a state legislator, he was president of one of the local unions which represent the employees in the petrochemical industry in the Pine Place area. A major concern of the union has been health and safety conditions in the petrochemical plants. Also working with the union was a physician, who had apparently substantiated claims that workers in a plant next to CDI were made ill by fumes from the CDI plant. This physician has given the Pine Place group some explanations and advice on technical reports.

Also during the summer, a university toxicologist began donating his time and expertise to the group. He had made numerous efforts to conduct a health study of the area but has been stopped through what was said to be political pressure.

In September, the level of blame directed toward CDI increased again, when the group discovered that during an air stagnation alert that month, CDI had illegally incinerated PCB's. Such a violation could have cost CDI \$25,000, but the state regulatory agency decided that any legal action against CDI would be too lengthy and costly, and thought that CDI's mistake was due to miscommunication between the two organizations. A Pine Place

group member recollects:

"...I was told back in February by EPA's acting regional director not to worry about burning PCB's on air stagnation days and I felt a lot better. And then I say they violated the rules, and it looks like nothing much is being done."

Actually, the fact that CDI was not fined should have surprised no one, since that same year, there were over 600 documented violations of air pollution regulations in the local industrial park, yet only 40 citations were issued, and only six firms fined.

Suspicious of payoffs and other borderline illegal activities were raised by the citizens' group. Comments to the press by CDI's vice-president raised further suspicions when he explained, "We (CDI) probably have good relations with all agencies." Such statements can be easily misinterpreted; no doubt the relations are good, but the group and others see such a statement as reinforcing their own beliefs of the close relationship between industry and the regulatory agencies. There exist a number of cases where former industry officials are currently working for regional EPA or the state regulatory agency. From such revelations, agencies came close to being targets of blame, but were never defined as such. Grace Harry of the group explains, "We (the group) are doing what our tax dollars are supposed to do." These agencies, however, could not be described as ever being targets of blame and scapegoating."

Also, during the late summer, the leader of the local environmental umbrella group contacted and encouraged a local reporter to investigate the Pine Place situation. After three months of intensive interviewing, the reporters wrote a series of articles whose approach focused on how the pollution and PCB's were creating a health hazard in Pine Place. Implicit (if not explicit) in these articles was the theory that CDI's incinerated PCB's were responsible for the many health problems that she had documented in Pine Place.

Needless to say, this evoked further reactions in the community. Probably intergroup hostility was increased in both directions. The company vice-president was furious over the "yellow journalism" and threatened to sue the paper for libel. The reporter, it is said, almost lost her job.

However, this episode (and subsequent incidents) was essentially the last time CDI was to be a target of blame by the group. Due to a number of factors, the group was already moving away from blaming CDI. Rather, they were working on a way to link air pollution to the health problems in a more general way, which was one of the major themes in the reporter's articles. At any rate, the group took the position that with so much industry in the area, it would be difficult to find out whose pollutants, if any, were the cause for any one specific illness.

During the spring of the next year, with the aid of the state legislators, the group was able to obtain soil samples to check for types of air pollution. The state regulatory agency did the research. It found one

toxic form of fungus which could cause skin rashes, but the source of the substance could not be ascertained. The group has continued trying to link various toxic substances in the air with health hazards.

It should be noted that about six months after the formation of the group, conflict began to develop between the members, due to Slick and some of her friends joining the group and due to their ideas and strategy differing from those of the original core membership. Slick and her friends started to divert attention from the perceived cause of health hazards (i.e., blaming CDI) and to direct attention toward the visible effects of the generally polluted air (i.e., skin rashes). This struggle led to the group's demise as a functioning entity. Before the group dissolved, the two factions were not on speaking terms.

During this period, another local industry applied for a permit to burn PCB's. On this occasion, EPA did have a public hearing, during which a great deal of opposition was expressed. Group members, however, felt that the decision for the permit was already determined, but were satisfied that at least the hearing was held. The group felt that the EPA's function should be protection of the public, but due to the recent political changes at the federal level, EPA has actually been a friend to industry. They also considered a protest march at the second plant, but this idea was rejected since the group realized it might lead to their being labeled "radical," a description not desirable in Pine Place.

#### The Analysis

There are a number of factors why CDI became the main, if not the sole, focal point of blame by the ECG's in Pine Place. It is quite evident the group felt that CDI was violating normative standards in the community. Not only did the group find one CDI violation, but continued to document other instances, such as receipt of an EPA permit without a public hearing, prior involvement in lawsuits over various violations, and operation during the air stagnation alert.

The group not only believed that CDI was violating a number of norms, but also felt that such violations benefited CDI and nobody else. Some group members felt that the community was serving as a guinea pig for the first study of the relationship between PCB's and public health. CDI's perception of matters was quite different, explaining that incineration was the safest method known for PCB disposal, and that the industry was adding jobs and money for the community.

Quite clearly, CDI's activities are aptly described by Fritz's (1957: 9) principle that

...the person or groups singled out for responsibility have been grossly negligent in the performance of their expected roles of action or inaction of these persons or groups blatantly violates the general social norms or established values.

Fritz (1957:9) also suggests that "widespread dissatisfaction or antagonism" must have existed before the blaming takes place. The attitude reflected by the state legislator and his union following, which includes many of the husbands of members of the Pine Place group, would fit this description. Through the years, much of the information about various violations was brought home from work by the husbands, and the wives quite often discussed their husbands' complaints. In general, air pollution (especially over the last 20 years) had been a topic of conversation in some households in Pine Place.

It is interesting to note that CDI was the only target of blame. This is a surprising deviation from findings of previous studies, which indicate multiple sources of blame, either at one point of time or during an extended period. Also, two recent studies regarding chemicals and possible health effects show that government regulatory agencies were the main focus of blame and hostility, and that the industry involved essentially escaped unscathed (Levin, 1982; Nigg and Cuthbertson, 1982). We need to explain why such agencies as the regional EPA or the state regulatory agency were not made targets of blame in Pine Place.

One major reason may be that numerous regulators maintained contact with group members and gave at least a sympathetic hearing to the group's complaints. At times, some of the officials would provide the group information that could not otherwise have been obtained by its members. Even though the group had perceived the regional EPA as a pro-industry agency, there were still a number of individuals working in non-political patronage offices who were able to aid the group, as were other agencies at the federal or state level that the group had contacts with. Also, the state regulatory agency had just released a report showing that the polluted air could be a cause of the skin rashes.

Unlike a number of blame studies, personalization of blame did not occur, an unexpected factor. One would think that CDI's Densmore would be a focal point of blame, especially due to his visibility. However, several factors explain why blame was not directed toward this specific person.

Drabek and Quarantelli (1967:12) note that the nature of the legal structure in American society lends itself to personalization of blame after a disaster. While culpability is part of the American institutional framework, "investigative agencies are constrained by a legal pattern which requires them to 'point the finger' at persons who are potentially legally responsible. The legal structure is such that only personal blame can be assessed (Drabek and Quarantelli, 1967:15)." At one time, the Pine Place group considered a legal approach to stop the incineration of PCB's, but its lack of financial resources prohibited such action. Since the group did not utilize litigation, the direction of blame toward Densmore through the legal structure could not occur.

This situation is quite different from the blaming process after the Indianapolis explosion, where Drabek (1968:117) demonstrates that structural variables were ignored by those placing blame. The group at Pine Place had more of a structural orientation; from the beginning, they realized that

they were fighting a "system," and that the system opposed the goals of the group. Although they were placing blame on CDI, they fully realized how the rules and operations of the regulatory agencies, as well as the networking among industry, the chamber of commerce, city council, and other entities, were all working against them. Beginning with its initial experiences, the group was virtually compelled to perceive the chain of events in a more structural than personalized sense.

In addition, many felt that their perceptions of Densmore prevented their making him the villain. Throughout the whole incident, the group members felt Densmore was a very nice person, notwithstanding his position at CDI. The group's positive contacts with Densmore, along with his positive portrayal in the papers, made it difficult if not impossible to direct blame toward him. Also, since Densmore had superiors headquartered in a distant state, the group perceived that he was just following orders, which explains why the more general "CDI" was used, which included not only "Pine Place," but all its other plants. Finally, since Densmore was the only conspicuous CDI official at Pine Place, the ability of the group to direct blame toward another specific person, in lieu of Densmore, was limited. When all these conditions are taken into consideration, it is hardly surprising that no personalization of blame occurred in this case; only further studies can reveal if such conditions occur often.

The preceding analysis explores and generally confirms and/or supplements basic themes previously explored in the blame literature. The following analysis focuses upon new ideas, that is, the role and process of blame within the ECG's and the process of blame in a diffuse disaster situation.

During the formation of the Pine Place ECG, the media, especially local newspapers, were the group's primary source of information. Subsequent sources included other individuals, groups, and organizations, especially those who supported the group's position. In other words, the function of the information flow from these sources was not only to serve as a means of obtaining necessary facts, but also to confirm the validity of a particular set of beliefs that existed among the group members. This flow of information remained broad enough to address the major concerns of both factions that had developed within the group.

Although the conflict in strategy and issue definition led to the group's eventual demise the initial defining of CDI as a target of blame was partially if not primarily responsible for the emergence and development of the group. While health problems, along with the general pollution problems, have existed in Pine Place for many years no groups had previously formed in the city to remedy the situation. These friends and neighbors were able to select CDI as a focal point to direct their concerns and frustrations over an issue that had developed over the years. This is why the strategy of holding a protest march and letter-writing campaign came into existence, actions which logically followed from the premise that a group rather than scattered individuals should deal with the situation. These people no longer had to deal with vague complaints such as "bad smelly air," but rather had something tangible (i.e., CDI) toward which their actions could be directed. The formation of a group, they felt, would aid their cause

in terms of increasing both their legitimacy and political influence, even if the increase were small.

Finally, this study, along with two other diffuse technological disaster situations (see Levine, 1982; Nigg and Cuthbertson, 1982) found blame placed on various organizations. A number of patterns exist in the three cases which may be due to their diffuse nature. Those similarities are

- (1) problems with having regulatory agencies performing health studies and the accompanying political maneuvering to suppress them;
- (2) various regulatory agencies proving incapable of handling the problem;
- (3) the citizens' group's attempt to have the situation defined as a crisis or disaster;
- (4) conflict between the regulatory agencies; and
- (5) problems of jurisdictional boundaries and responsibilities.

In many cases, a more focalized disaster situation would minimize or eliminate these conditions. Only in the case of Pine Place was an industry the target of blame due to people's perception of management of the situation. In the other two cases, blame was directed toward the regulatory agencies. It is important to note that in all three cases, blame was directed toward organizations.

It should also be noted that in the other study of a diffuse impact (a severe winter), organizations were specifically the target of blame. In the studies of the focalized impacts (i.e., plane crashes, fires, explosions) individuals are the focus of blame. This would suggest that the nature of the impact may be a factor whether individuals or organizations are blamed for the disaster.

### Conclusion

There are many ways which blame can be placed and directed during a situation defined as a disaster by some sector of the population. In this case, focusing blame on CDI for polluted air led to the development of an organized response by a group of neighborhood housewives. Hence, the intensity of blame increased when specific issues and incidents became public, gradually decreasing until the next incident took place.

Although one of the group's initial focal points was to place blame on CDI, the subsequent assimilation of new group members changed the definition of the group's tasks. Both factions eventually concerned themselves with the health issues than with assignment of blame. Much of the internal conflict centered around specific modes of strategy and selection of issues to be highlighted for public debate. Once the task of the group shifted from placing blame to publicizing health-related issues, some important progress was accomplished in attempts to facilitate change within the community. City Council has become more responsive to the citizens' concerns, and the regulatory agencies have become more sympathetic, if not

helpful, to those concerned with the health issues. This aspect supports Drabek and Quarantelli's (1967:16) contention that placement of blame may prevent structural changes within the social system. In this case, blaming CDI initially detracted from the group's accomplishing structural changes within the community. Once the group diminished its attack against CDI, significant accommodations were made with various political or regulatory organizations. In this situation, offering explanations rather than blaming CDI was a potentially sound means of being heard and encouraging change in this highly-industrialized community.

Yet, ironically, the placement of blame served as a fundamental rallying point during the group's initial organization, then helped maintain its solidarity during difficult times. Clearly, when CDI was the focal point of the group, its internal structure was highly organized and formal. As the focus shifted to the health issue, the ECG more resembled an informal group of housewives concerned over an issue, rather than a political entity. If the group had not assumed its initial structure and organization, it would not have been capable of the success if achieved.

The issues of the roles of ECG's need to be further explored, as does the relationship between the type of disaster impact (diffuse vs. focalized) and who or what is blamed. Conditions of type of impact (technological vs. natural) and the type of blame, if any, need to be further investigated. It needs to be noted that not all ECG's place blame, and such situations need to be more clearly understood. Finally, it is necessary to further ascertain the influence this blaming process has in the group's development, strategy, and impact in creating social change.

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