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STORY FORMAT COMPARISON

**A Dangerous Business**

Frontline documentary/NY Times series

**1.** Some of the principal sources used in this joint investigation were: the employee handbook, Marcos Lopez (Tyler Pipe employee), Michelle Sankowsky (nurse and former Workmen’s Health and Compensation Manager, Tyler Pipe), Robert S. Rester (former McWane plant manager), Clyde E. Dorn (former safety director, Union Foundry), Charles Jeffress (former Assistant Secretary of Labor, OSHA), John Henshaw (current Assistant Secretary of Labor, OSHA), Dennis Vacco (former New York state attorney general), Robert Bobinis (maintenance supervisor, Atlantic States), April Hoskin-Silva (Rolan Hoskin’s daughter), G. Ruffner Page (McWane President), Kevin Fowler (human resources manager from 1996-1999), Bobby Hopson (former president of Local 1157 of the United Steelworkers of America), inspectors from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and Ira Cofer (maintenance worker).

I think the human sources, such as the victims (McWane employees) and their family members who were interviewed worked best in the documentary, because the viewer could sympathize with them better. Their emotions and reactions were visible. Two examples are: Rolan Hoskin’s daughter, April and Frank Wagner’s widow, Jane. They were both deeply saddened by their losses. The text sources worked best in the print version, because they could just be typed out. For example, the employee handbook is an ideal source, because the quotes in it are already written (not spoken).

**2.** The documentary could put a face to the name, allowing the human sources’ emotions to come through. Although many of the sources were mentioned in text, there wasn’t enough written information that one could refer back to. The documentary showed graphic photos and video footage of interviews, which put the viewers in the hype of the investigation. The viewers could hear the New York Times reporters ask questions and hear the answers from the interviewees. There was also clear commentary describing the investigation when interviews weren’t being held. The documentary’s format allows for mostly a movie-type presentation with some still photographs, but doesn’t have much in print to read. There is not much that I would do differently in the documentary. I thought it was very well-presented and revealed a lot more than print alone could ever do.

The print version was very detail-oriented. Even though the audience was only reading, there was a lot of imagery throughout the investigation, such as the descriptions on each death that was mentioned. Furthermore, there were graphic photos—just like in the documentary—that could aid the reader’s understanding of the facts. I think this format was extremely long. Three parts was not necessary, although I found the titles to the different sections cleverly chosen. However, society today doesn’t have the time or patience to sit down and read such a long story. The reporters had an excellent coverage of different sources, but they could have summarized some aspects or deleted others. This would have made the document much more enjoyable and less time consuming to read. However, I think the research done by the journalists was more apparent in print. Not only were there important quotes, but there was commentary on what was found out.

**3.** The two presentations had many differences. The documentary had videos of interviews and the workplaces as well as still photographs of former employees who died on the job (even graphic shots of the accidents). The interviewers, victims, and human sources were all visible through the documentary, which gives the audience a feel that this investigation was real and to be taken very seriously.

On the other hand, the print version was primarily typed-up words set into small paragraphs. There were numerous sections in each of the three parts in the series. There were also a few photographs to visually explain the happenings of the investigation. Unlike the documentary, the interviewers, victims, and human sources couldn’t be heard, but only understood by reading their comments.

**4.** Overall, given the specific topic, I think the documentary was journalistically stronger, because even though there wasn’t much to be read, it was more believable, since one could understand it better by watching all of the happenings and listening to the different sources. The documentary even showed the New York Times reporters interviewing people and the viewer could also hear commentary between interviews. There would be no doubt in the viewers mind that this case was completely objective (unless they were skeptic that the movie was edited too much).

**5.** Because of this journalistic investigation, McWane was fined $8 million for dozens of safety and environmental crimes at its New Jersey plant, Atlantic States. Four of the plant's managers went to prison from six months to 70 months. The courts have imposed almost $20 million in criminal fines and McWane has paid millions more in penalties imposed by government regulatory agencies.

In October 2007, the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the convictions of McWane and its managers in the Alabama McWane case. The court ordered a new trial on charges relating to the Clean Water Act, based on a recent Supreme Court decision interpreting part of that law.

The company says it has forced out many of the old managers at its troubled foundries. McWane officials also say the company has spent more than $300 million on improvements since 1999, and after the original broadcast it hired [three former high-ranking government officials](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/mcwane/interviews/habicht.html) to serve as architects of its turnaround. The company also uses advanced computer programs to track injuries and environmental compliance.

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