THE IRE JOURNAL

Fall 2011
Volume 34
Number 4

PROTECTING CONSUMERS

PHANTOM JOBS
How many people really get work thanks to business incentives?

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE
Panamanian website collects tips on crime, corruption

DRUGGING KIDS
Tracking the use of antipsychotics on juveniles in jail

foodsafety.news21.com

NEWS21

HOW SAFE IS YOUR FOOD?

Thousands of Americans are sickened or die each year as a result of food-borne illnesses. A flawed and fragmented regulatory system plagued by politics and confusion is at least partly to blame.

This report examines what's being done - and what's not being done - to prevent, detect and respond to food-borne illness outbreaks.

News21 is headquartered at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

Carnegie Corporation of New York

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
www.knightfoundation.org

THE IRE JOURNAL

FALL 2011

PROTECTING CONSUMERS: The government claims it's looking out for consumers, but often it takes a journalist to expose problems and spur action.

Pages 16-24

THE IRE JOURNAL

VOLUME 34 | NUMBER 4

The IRE Journal (ISSN0164-7016) is published four times a year by Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc., 141 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism,Columbia, MO 65211,573-882-2042. Email: journal@ire.org. U.S. subscriptions are $70 for individuals, $85 for libraries and $125 for institutions/businesses. International subscriptions are $90 for individuals and $150 for all others. Periodical postage paid at Jefferson City, Mo. Postmaster: Please send address changes to IRE. USPS #451-670

Awards, website change with the times

BY MARK HORVIT
IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This is a season of evolution at IRE.

We have rebuilt our IRE Awards categories to better reflect the ways in which news is gathered and presented. And we have launched a new website that is easier to navigate, makes it easier for you to take advantage of our resources and gives you more control over your membership.

Why did we revamp the IRE Awards? Simple: our industry is changing and we needed to change with it. Periodically over the past three decades, the awards categories have been altered and the entry guidelines revised, as circulation and viewership trends changed and as the work of our members evolved. I can make a pretty good argument that never before has the news business changed so much in such a short period of time, as technology has offered new ways to gather and present investigative work while economic cutbacks have squeezed resources and helped encourage reporting partnerships that crossed platforms and media types. Contest judges and IRE members were finding it increasingly difficult to put many contest entries into our existing categories. For example, online organizations were restricted to one category, regardless of the type of work they did or the size of the organization.

More than a year ago, the IRE Board charged the contest committee with the task of examining whether our contest should change to reflect the times. As part of that effort, we surveyed membership. You told us what elements of the contest were important to you – including entry categories that acknowledge that different organizations have different resources. Many of you also let us know that you found it frustrating to force your work into our existing categories, which weren't designed to encompass projects in which newspapers shot video, broadcasters built multimedia websites, radio stations partnered with print organizations and online news organizations teamed up with existing media.

After much debate, we've come up with a model that we believe not only addresses the way media operate today, but which is flexible enough to handle further evolution.

The basic concept is simple: Instead of basing categories on media type – newspaper, TV broadcaster, etc. – we are grouping entries by the nature of the work itself:

- Print/Online text (written word)
- Broadcast/Video
- Radio/Audio
- Multiplatform

And there are three size categories: small, medium and large. (For a definition of each category, see our website at www.ire.org). A large newspaper, national online-only organization or network broadcaster can enter the large "Print/Online text" category if the focus of the project is a written story; a Top 20 market broadcaster or midsize-circulation newspaper can enter the medium "Broadcast/Video" category for a video or documentary they've made.

Special thanks go to the members of the contest committee and especially former board member Cheryl Phillips and current board member Lea Thompson, who enthusiastically took on this challenge and wrangled it through various stages. They passionately believed change was necessary and dedicated countless hours to see it through.

We believe this new model will allow us to better match projects in categories. And it's vitally important to remember that one thing hasn't changed: the contest's focus on content. Judges will still focus on the reporting and the results.

As with any new model, we may need to tweak some things as we move forward. Please check out the new rules and let me know what you think at mhorvit@ire.org.

While we were updating the contest, we completely revamped the IRE website. All the resources you count on are still available, from tipsheets and the vast story library to our unmatched data collection. Our goal was

to streamline the site and make our deep reservoir of resources easier to find and use. For example, tipsheets are now linked from the home page, and a new feature lets you call up the most recent additions, so you can quickly see what's new.

And we've added new services, including "story packs," which compile the best of our resources on specific topics, helping you quickly find the best tipsheets, stories, databases and on key subjects. We've started with several; if there's a topic you'd like us to add, please email Resource Center Director Lauren Grandestaff at lauren@ire.org.

Our home page blog now offers all the new content we post on the site, from Extra! Extra! entries to member news, job postings and training tips. And you can still find all of those, and more, in individual blogs throughout the site.

You can also now manage your membership online, updating your specialty areas, employer, address, etc. And every member can comment on postings throughout the site. We're hoping you'll help us start conversations on investigative reporting.

Special thanks to IRE members Chase Davis and Matt Waite, who tackled this project through their company, Hot Type Consulting, and donated many more hours than our contract called for, and to the fine design team at Upstatement, who helped us come up with a new look and more importantly, a new way to organize and present all of the resources IRE has to offer.

Please give the new site a test run and let me know what you think.

And stay tuned for more developments on many fronts, including exciting new projects for DocumentCloud. And be assured that as IRE works to keep pace with your changing needs, we remain focused on the goal we've always had – to help you do better work and make a fundamental difference in your communities and beyond.

Mark Horvit is executive director of IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He can be reached at mhorvit@ire.org or 573-882-2042.

MEMBER NEWS

Robert Cribb of the *Toronto Star* won a 2011 Canadian Association of Journalists Investigative Journalism Award for a story exploring politics and corruption in the Russian hockey system. He is studying medical ethics for a year as a Kierans-Janigan Fellow at Massey College in the University of Toronto. Next, he will research and write a series of stories on end-of-life issues and disputes between physicians and families over the lives of patients as a recipient of a 2012 Atkinson Mini Journalism Fellowship.

Paul D'Ambrosio led the *Asbury Park Press* team that won the 2011 Knight Award for Public Service from the Online News Association for the multimedia series "Barnegat Bay Under Stress."

D'Ambrosio and **Shannon Mullen** also won a first-place National Headliner Award for the second year in a row for their story about property taxes in New Jersey.

Ted Mellnik has moved to *The Washington Post* after three decades at the *The Charlotte Observer*. A computer-assisted reporting specialist, Mellnik won a Polk Award in 2007 and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Gold Medal for Public Service in 1995 and 2008. He spent the last year at the University of Michigan and various sites abroad on a Knight-Wallace fellowship.

Gavin Off has joined the *Charlotte Observer* as a database reporter. Off spent the previous three years as database editor at the *Tulsa World*. Previously, he served as a data analyst for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting.

PHANTOM JOBS

Promises, tax breaks fail to boost economy

By Bob Segall
WTHR-TV, Indianapolis

We discovered some of the companies that had allegedly added hundreds of jobs actually laid off hundreds of workers instead.

Let's face it. We get intoxicated by the balloons and marching bands. Mesmerized by the ribbons and gold-plated shovels. Swept up in the hope, optimism and sheer excitement that engulf our communities each time we show up to cover a big job announcement.

In recent years – when so many of our readers, viewers, friends, family and colleagues have been facing unemployment and financial hardship – it's been hard *not* to revel in feel-good stories about new jobs.

But far too often, we enthusiastically regurgitate what we're told in those economic development press releases. We report the exact number of new jobs that soon will be coming to our big cities and small towns, generating millions of future dollars for our local economies. We interview the mayor, the governor, the proud company executive. The ribbon-cutting is front-page news. The celebration is lead story at 6. And then, like everybody else, we tend to forget about it.

So what happened to all those new jobs we reported on a few years ago? Was that ribbon-cutting the start of something big, or just a photo op filled with empty promises? Were the factories, offices and warehouses ever built?

Bill Ditton | WTHR-TV

Laid-off Global Tool employees meet for lunch at a VFW hall near Fort Wayne, Ind. Another company, X-Y Tool, bought and closed Global Tool, firing dozens of workers, including those pictured. The Indiana Economic Development Corporation listed X-Y Tool as an "Indiana Economic Success."

Far too often, we simply forget to ask.

Asking those questions never occurred to me until I looked closely at a 2009 press release from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation. The office claimed it had created more than 85,000 Indiana jobs since Gov. Mitch Daniels founded the quasi-state economic development agency in 2005. The numbers provided a stark contrast to the state's near-record unemployment rate (346,000 Hoosiers out of work in May 2009). Something did not add up, so we asked the agency for more information.

Officials balked. While the agency provided a list of its "economic successes" – companies that announced plans to bring new jobs to Indiana in exchange for millions of dollars in state tax breaks and other economic incentives – it refused to release detailed information showing which companies had followed through on their job commitments and which had not. An exemption in Indiana's Access to Public Records Act allowed the agency to withhold the information.

Our long journey to answer the question, "Where are the jobs?" was about to begin.

The first task was to create a database. Investigative producer Cyndee Hebert entered the names of nearly 800 companies that the agency listed as Indiana Economic Successes, looked up their phone numbers and began calling each one. Officials at some of the companies were happy to provide us with a progress report. Most of the companies we contacted, however, did not want to share information. Local economic development offices did not want to talk, either.

The easiest, most direct sources of information were not cooperating. Making matters worse, other businesses on the Indiana Economic Successes list had no working phone number and no current information posted with the Indiana Secretary of State or Department of Labor. We moved to Plan B.

Tracking down media reports and corporate filings in other states revealed that some of Indiana's so-called Economic Successes had filed for bankruptcy or dropped their expansion plans due to the recession. Hebert got details on other businesses by calling mayors, town managers and county clerks to determine if job promises in their communities had been fulfilled. We discovered some of the companies that had allegedly added hundreds of jobs actually *laid off* hundreds of workers instead. What had been empty spaces in our database were now overflowing with valuable information and more accurate numbers than what we had received from IEDC.

While Cyndee continued her research, photojournalist Bill Ditton and I hit the road to figure out what happened to the companies for which we still hadn't been able to find any information. We traveled to all corners of the state, along the way finding some of the most powerful images for the investigation. Bill and I discovered empty cornfields, deserted lots and abandoned factories where agency officials claimed there were tens of thousands of new jobs. We added our findings to the database, and the video became a cornerstone of our reports.

By early 2010 – nine months after we began the project – we had collected enough information in our jobs database to determine the state's self-reported job numbers were a sham; IEDC and the governor had been boasting of job statistics that were far from reality, promoting broken job commitments as actual jobs long after some of the deals fell apart. Of the nearly 100,000 jobs announced by the agency, WTHR determined approximately 40 percent never materialized.

We had compelling numbers and powerful images, but we still

lacked an important ingredient. We needed to put a face on the numbers. We set out to find the *people* who would bring the story to life, and we found them in some unexpected places:

- Inside an abandoned auto parts factory (where the state had cited hundreds of new jobs), we found dozens of recently laid-off workers had signed their names on a wall. Many included a poignant message and the number of years they had worked at the plant. We tracked down some of those unemployed workers to include their extraordinary stories in our report.
- We reviewed recent emails and phone calls from viewers complaining about long delays in the state's unemployment benefits system, and we discovered some of those viewers had just been let go from companies listed as Indiana Economic Successes. They added valuable perspective.
- We reached out via Facebook to find Indiana families that had recently suffered a layoff and were struggling to make ends meet. They helped us show the human story behind the numbers.

We then found respected and dynamic economists to help us – and our viewers – make sense of a complex topic. The economists reviewed our numbers, confirmed our findings and translated complicated economic development concepts into digestible sound bites that even my 9-year-old son could understand.

Our investigative team now had everything we needed. The data, the video, the victims, the experts – all the elements came together to show state leaders had been providing a misleading, overly optimistic picture of job creation in Indiana. Our first story aired in March 2010, and it might have been our last, had it not been for a challenge from the governor.

Gov. Daniels was not impressed with WTHR's "Where are the jobs?" investigation. The popular, charismatic, highly visible governor had declined four requests to meet with WTHR to discuss our findings prior to the broadcast. For weeks he refused to talk about his administration's job claims. The governor broke his silence just hours after the report aired, declaring it much ado about nothing.

"You seem to have a blindingly clear view of what is perfectly obvious," Daniels told a crowd of reporters at the Indiana Statehouse, admitting he knew many of the job creation projects previously reported by his economic development agency had fallen short of expectations. But he insisted the actual number of jobs created was close to his administration's original claims. Asked to show proof, the governor told us to show up at IEDC's next public board meeting – several months away – where the details would be released.

We did attend that meeting. Despite his invitation, neither the governor nor the agency offered any detailed numbers to show which companies had fulfilled their job promises. When we again asked Daniels for those details, he quickly walked out a back door of the meeting room.

We knew there was much more to the story. Even though state taxpayers were footing the bill for tens of millions of dollars in tax breaks for Indiana's so-called Economic Successes, state officials insisted the public was not entitled to see specific results or failures. More than a year after we had started our research, we were more determined than ever to tell the whole story.

Ten more stories followed, each trying to answer the question: "Where are the jobs?" We showed nearby states readily released the same jobs data that Indiana considered to be confidential trade secrets. We revealed large Indiana corporations laid off hundreds of workers in order to create "new" jobs that could qualify them for new incentives and tax breaks. We showed state lawmakers and members of IEDC's own board of directors calling for reform and transparency within an agency shrouded in secrecy.

Eventually, the investigations prompted dramatic results: IEDC acknowledged inaccurate job totals, revised its reporting process, provided more job data on its public website, released thousands of pages of previously undisclosed documents, conducted a comprehensive audit (which confirmed all of WTHR's major findings) and published an annual report reflecting adjusted job numbers.

After years of reporting on new jobs for Hoosiers, we finally set the record straight. Many of the jobs we had reported weren't really jobs at all.

Bob Segall has been chief investigative reporter at WTHR-TV in Indianapolis since 2006. He specializes in government spending, consumer safety, health care and environmental reporting. "Where are the jobs?" won a 2010 IRE Award, as well as a duPont-Columbia Award, Peabody Award and national Edward R. Murrow Award.

We discovered empty cornfields, deserted lots and abandoned factories where officials claimed there were tens of thousands of new jobs.

TEST THE PROMISES

- **Get the official scoop.** City and state economic development agencies love to brag. Competition is fierce, and they are trying hard to justify their existence. Their biggest and boldest job claims usually can be found in their annual reports and on their official websites. Use those claims as your starting point.
- **Ask the right questions.** What is your economic development agency reporting: the number of actual jobs that companies have created or the number of jobs that companies say they will create? Does the agency update its job creation statistics to reflect companies that withdrew or downgraded their jobs commitments? Are job numbers reported by the agency self-reported by companies or independently audited by a third party?
- **Remember that jobs are not created overnight.** Job announcements usually come with a timeline. To receive state or local incentives, a company may have to meet specific annual job targets, or it might have a long-term window in which to reach its job creation goals. Ask for contracts and timelines to see how expectations and goals compare to actual job creation.
- **Think local.** Companies that receive state tax breaks and incentives usually apply for (and receive) local incentives, as well. To receive those incentives, companies often must submit proof of performance. Check with township, city and county officials to obtain tax abatement and other incentive documentation that may show annual performance related to job creation.
- **Think local again.** Has your mayor, township supervisor or county executive made grandiose job claims? Start small. Examining job realization numbers for your city or county can provide valuable information and a great story – and should take far less time than looking statewide.
- **Don't go to the top – at least not right away.** Receptionists, operators, sales staff and human resources officials can be great sources of information. When contacting a company directly for job creation information, don't begin by asking for the CEO. Asking a receptionist, "Did your company ever build that new plant in Kokomo?" can be a great starting point for information – lots of information. The worst that can happen is that your call will be referred to the CEO or PR department anyway.

– Bob Segall, WTHR-TV, Indianapolis

DANGER AT WORK

Workplace safety laws fail to protect workers

By John Ryan
KUOW Puget Sound Public Radio

KUOW found that farm and factory workers in Washington are four times less likely than construction workers to have a state inspector look after their safety. Employees of other injury-prone industries get even less attention from safety regulators.

Work in the United States is a lot safer than it was 40 years ago, when the federal government passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act. The law mandated safe workplaces for all American workers, and it created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, an agency that has become a symbol of regulatory excess to its critics in Congress and business.

Yet more than 4,500 Americans still die on the job each year, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Several million are hurt. In Washington state, someone dies on the job about every four days. Somebody reports being injured every few hours.

In July, KUOW Puget Sound Public Radio explored the causes and consequences of unsafe working conditions in a five-part series, "Danger at Work" (http://ow.ly/6qOy4).

Nationwide, workplace safety laws are rarely enforced, whether oversight is a state or federal responsibility. (Washington state and 20 others operate their own workplace safety programs; federal OSHA runs the show in the rest of the country.) KUOW found that when officials try to enforce the law, they often look in the wrong places. Many workers remain exposed to unsafe, often violent workplaces. And I stumbled upon an odd loophole in a safety law that lets workers in one of the few heavily scrutinized industries climb a hundred feet or more overhead with no safety devices to keep them from falling, likely to their deaths.

Misdirected inspections

Some jobs, of course, are more dangerous than others. Construction work, for example, often involves heights, heavy machinery and the constantly changing hazards of a workplace that rises day by day from a hole in the ground.

So when the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries (the agency responsible for enforcing workplace safety laws) sends out inspectors, it zooms in on construction. The building trades are a small part of the state's labor force, but those jobs are so dangerous that half of all state safety inspections target construction sites.

Meanwhile, workers in other dangerous industries get a small fraction of the attention that construction workers do.

KUOW found that farm and factory workers in Washington are four times less likely to have a state inspector look after their safety. Employees of other injury-prone industries get even less attention from safety regulators. For many high-risk workers, a visit from a safety inspector is a once-in-a-lifetime event.

State officials acknowledge they're doing a poor job of directing their inspectors to the most dangerous workplaces.

Labor and Industries' assistant director Michael Silverstein says his inspectors discover hazards only half as often as they should, given the number of workplace accidents. Silverstein says the agency is continually adjusting where it sends inspectors. It has convened business and labor interests to retool the program to get more safety bang for the inspection buck. Still, regulators haven't kept up with a changing economy.

When Washington state established its safety programs in the early 1970s, there was no software industry, no dot-coms. A lot more of the workforce wore hard hats.

"The inspectors that were hired initially tended to have experience in construction, in logging, in some of the other industries," Silverstein told KUOW. "We certainly didn't have people on board who had real firsthand experience and knowledge in, for example, the health care industries, until recently. Our balance is still not right, but those are not things that you change overnight."

Seeds of the series

Two years ago, after being hired as KUOW's first investigative reporter, I attended my first investigative journalism conference. It was the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting's annual geekfest, full of journalists with tech skills and jargon that left me in the dust. Disturbingly few radio reporters were in the house.

I signed up for the conference's Microsoft Access database classes and looked for data-driven stories to sink my teeth into. David McKie and Phil Harbord of the CBC/Radio-Canada held a session demonstrating how to turn a database into a story. The Canadian presenters kindly chose a U.S. data source to show their mostly American audience how to investigate workplace safety. Funny thing, they chose my state, Washington, for the exercise and found the same problems they'd documented in Canada.

And nobody else from the Northwest was in the room.

Cha-ching! A nearly finished investigation, with solid results, dropped in my lap! I'd just have to get the latest data and reproduce the database work that McKie and Harbord showed us how to do. Piece of cake!

Not so fast.

Employment figures came free from the state's employment agency. But for the records of accidents, complaints and inspections, I had to convince my managers at KUOW to buy the data, something I believe they'd never done for journalistic purposes. NICAR's data library provides cleaned-up databases from OSHA and lots of other federal agencies at modest prices to journalists. Buying data from NICAR instead of cleaning up mistakes and inconsistencies yourself can be a big time saver, especially if (like me) you're not a database whiz.

IRE PARTNERSHIP

- The investigation of worker safety by KUOW Puget Sound Public Radio benefited from a new IRE collaboration. KUOW was one of four news organizations selected in 2010 for IRE's Community Partnership Program. Through a generous grant from the McCormick Foundation in Chicago, IRE worked to bolster watchdog reporting in two newsrooms in metro Chicago and two newsrooms in metro Seattle.
- Through the program, each newsroom received two full days of customized watchdog training, story consultations, free access to IRE's extensive database library, data analysis assistance and six months of follow-up training.
- IRE's other partner newsrooms were *The Daily Herald* (Everett, Wash.), WBEZ public radio (Chicago) and *The Daily Herald* (Arlington Heights, Ill.).

In this case, my modest database skills weren't up to the task. Working intermittently between other stories, I stopped and started several times on the project. But I was never able to dedicate the time necessary to get it off the ground.

Fast-forward a year. KUOW was fortunate to get a training grant from IRE.

I learned that what I'd been trying to do with software I didn't know well (Access) could also be accomplished with software I was already comfortable using (Microsoft Excel). IRE's Jaimi Dowdell and Doug Haddix helped me pair up the workplace inspection records with employment figures, sector by sector, over the past decade. A simple pivot table in Excel drew out the lopsided patterns of state inspections.

I made sure to share my findings and methods with the Department of Labor and Industries before we went to air.

Radio challenges

Radio may be the most difficult medium for data-driven investigations. With no rewind button, no sidebars, no visuals and an audience that is often multitasking, radio stories full of numbers or other dense information can easily go in one ear and out the other. (We did put a chart summarizing the findings on the series' website, http://ow.ly/6qOop, but most of our audience still listens exclusively over the airwaves.)

So I focused on where the data pointed me rather than the data itself. Discovering that the safety of health care workers was largely being ignored by state regulators, I zoomed in on that sector and two of its most injury-prone specialties: emergency rooms and psychiatric wards. Two stories focused on violence in emergency rooms and at Western State Hospital, the state's largest psychiatric institution.

Western is the most violent workplace in Washington: employees reported 331 assaults there last year, mostly by patients. Western's unionized workers weren't afraid to speak out about the problem.

But beyond the confines of Western State Hospital, almost no front-line caregivers would go on the record about violence at their workplaces.

Radio stories need human voices. So I beat the bushes looking for hospital workers with firsthand experiences of violence on the job. Nurses' unions and hospitals nationwide have been actively working to draw attention to violence against health care employees. I persuaded several health care unions to ask their members to share their personal stories. We also put out feelers through KUOW's Public Insight Network, the station's database of volunteer sources.

I spoke with many nurses. But in the end, the only emergency-room caregiver I could get to go on tape with firsthand experience of violence was the head of the state's Emergency Nurses Association. Even he would speak to me only if I agreed not to name the hospital where he works.

Nurses' reluctance to go public with their experiences mirrors what researchers have found: Many victims of workplace violence fail to report the incidents, often for fear of being blamed for them. As a result, the true scale of violence in health care settings remains unknown.

I was close to finishing the "Danger at Work" series when, on my bike ride to work one morning, I saw a group of electrical lineworkers free-climbing a 200-foot transmission tower—clearly a dangerous line of work. Despite my imminent deadline, I decided to stop and pursue one more angle on workplace safety. Fortunately, my smart phone has a good-enough microphone and software to get radio-quality sound. I discovered that lineworkers are specifically exempted from the federal safety laws that require other workers to use harnesses or other safety measures when they climb tall towers. (They do have to tie in for safety once they reach their destination high overhead. But their unprotected climbs can last eight minutes.)

John Ryan | KUOW-FM

Seattle City Light lineworkers head to work 180 feet off the ground. They don't clip in their safety harnesses until they finish the eight-minute climb.

Billions worth of new transmission lines are springing up across the country as the nation's demand for electricity surges. Does your local utility allow lineworkers to take such grave risks as they climb? Many tower climbers are colorful, macho characters; their work can resemble a Cirque du Soleil performance. The risks they take to help power our lives can make an important and visually striking story almost anywhere electricity flows.

John Ryan is an investigative reporter for KUOW Puget Sound Public Radio in Seattle. He may be reached at jryan@kuow.org.

PILL PUSHERS

Doctors prescribe heavy antipsychotics to jailed kids in poorly monitored system

By Michael LaForgia
The Palm Beach Post

In March, Florida put out a press release trumpeting a lawsuit against drugmaker AstraZeneca, slamming the pharmaceutical giant for pushing its blockbuster antipsychotic, Seroquel, on children. The medication, Florida claimed, could saddle kids with serious health problems, such as diabetes, weight gain, heart trouble and permanent, incurable facial tics.

There was just one problem. The state, unknown to the attorney general who filed the suit, was giving tons of Seroquel to kids in juvenile jails. It was a practice that child advocates and industry insiders called "chemical restraint."

Getting at this story took a lot of hectoring of state employees and careful scrutiny of government and custom-built databases. When the work was done, though, *The Palm Beach Post* had a hell of a scoop: Florida's juvenile justice system was pouring hundreds of thousands of antipsychotic pills into jails for kids – and the state's psychiatrists were taking money from companies that make the mind-altering pills.

What's more, doctors got hired even after they had admitted to using jailed kids to rip off Medicaid, or had been accused of drugging patients until the patients had overdosed and died. The lessons drawn from tracking drugs and vetting doctors would come in handy for digging into juvenile jails in other states – but also for scrutinizing the use of drugs and the roles of doctors who work with any vulnerable group.

The series is online at http://ow.ly/6qfhx.

Ray Graham | Palm Beach Post

Mine drug-buying data

The first step was getting the state to give up drug information.

Luckily, the legislature had ordered Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice to total the top drugs it used, complete with exact amounts of pills and dollar figures, and turn it over in the form of detailed tables. What didn't seem so lucky was that the reports were almost three years old and covered only drugs purchased for a fraction of the state's juvenile lockups. Even so, state spokespeople said, they were the most current numbers we could get.

In time, the lack of data turned out to be a crucial part of the story: Florida's system of tracking prescriptions was so screwed up that even the people who ran it couldn't make it spit out key figures.

Turning to the numbers we had, I saw that something startling was going on in the state's jails for kids. Pivot tables generated with Microsoft Excel showed that between mid 2006 and mid 2008, Florida had doled out 326,081 antipsychotic tablets – potent tranquilizers that can turn problem kids into nodding zombies – in jails that could hold no more than 2,300 children at any given moment. The state had bought enough drugs to hand out 446 pills a day, seven days a week, for two years in a row.

A string of federal and state lawsuits had targeted AstraZeneca, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Pfizer and other companies for illegally marketing antipsychotics for kids. Using these as reference points, I pressed juvenile justice officials to explain. Why were jailed kids getting so many pills?

Their answer, at first, was copied verbatim off the drugs' FDA label. Only after repeated questioning did the state acknowledge that kids routinely were prescribed drugs for insomnia, anxiety and other reasons that had never been approved by federal regulators.

Check out the doctors

Doctors were responsible for writing these thousands of prescriptions. Next came finding out who they were. Public records requests to the juvenile justice department yielded a list of 53 psychiatrists who had contracted with the state in the past five years.

Records kept by regulators at the Florida Health Department, always the first stop for checking out doctors, showed some had gotten in trouble for overprescribing and other violations.

Next, I turned to another valuable tool for vetting physicians, the state's medical malpractice claims database, which is kept by Florida's Office of Insurance Regulation. (Other states might or might not make these records available.) The database contains key information about claims related to legal fees and settlements paid by insurers on behalf of doctors facing malpractice suits. The search showed a handful of suits had been brought against some of the state's hired doctors, including cases in which children had died of reactions to mind-altering drugs.

Then, I tried something I never had done before: Trolling drug company payment disclosure forms. About three years ago, pharmaceutical companies started posting breakdowns of doctor payments – whether for speaker fees, travel, meals or other freebies – as part of agreements to settle federal lawsuits.

A good place to start is with ProPublica's Dollars for Docs database, at http://projects.propublica.org/docdollars." It allows you to search filings of about a dozen companies totaling hundreds of millions in payments. It's a great tool, but I found that it didn't contain each and every payment to the doctors I was scrutinizing. More payment reports were available that hadn't made it into the database yet.

To make sure you have the most up-to-date information, use Google to find the original payment data on each company's website. It can take some poking around (searching for it, you get a sneaking suspicion the records weren't meant to be found easily).

AstraZeneca, Eli Lilly and Co. and GlaxoSmithKline publish PDF payment reports, while Pfizer makes a searchable database available online. When I compared names of the juvenile justice doctors with disclosure forms from these four companies, things really got interesting. Seventeen of the psychiatrists, or one in three, had pocketed money or gifts from companies that make antipsychotic drugs. They combined to accept $253,982 in 18 months.

This is a good place to note that you can do a lot more with the payment records than check out psychiatrists in juvenile jails. Since the reports cover money and gifts given to doctors nationwide, reporters who want to use them are limited only by their imaginations. Nothing's there to stop you, for example, from making a list of doctors who also serve as your state's lawmakers and then checking for whether they took drug company payments. You never know.

If you explore these records, one thing to keep in mind is whether your state has laws that require doctors to disclose payments or gifts from drug companies. Some states do. Most don't.

Put it into context

So these psychiatrists were taking money and gifts from drug companies. So what?

To get a sense of whether this made any difference, I wanted to track prescribing. One way was through Medicaid billing records. Again, I got lucky: Florida had recently started contracting with a state university to monitor Medicaid prescribing of mind-altering drugs.

The school's researchers worked up detailed reports that ranked doctors based on prescriptions for antipsychotics and other drugs. Some of the information focused just on antipsychotics given to kids. And it was broken down by quarter, making it possible to look at a doctor's prescribing habits before taking money, and after.

Twelve of the juvenile justice doctors ranked among the top 5 percent of Florida's Medicaid billers for mind-altering drugs. And, in at least one case, billing by a doctor who took more than $65,000 from drug companies shot up around the time he was paid.

Read inspection, police reports

Reporters, as a rule, aren't allowed inside Florida's juvenile jails. To get a sense of what was going on in these places, I pulled police reports and searched inspection records online.

First, I asked police agencies with jurisdiction over the two juvenile lockups in my county for lists of calls for service to the jails. The calls list yielded a string of case numbers for claims of child abuse, assault, attempted suicide and my favorite type of report, "information."

I pulled those reports and went over them closely, flagging the names and numbers of jailed kids to follow up with them later (names of children committed to Florida's juvenile justice system normally are confidential).

Next I turned to the juvenile justice department's inspection reports. Several years' worth were available as PDFs on the juvenile justice department's website, and I used Google's site search function to scan thousands of pages of records for keywords (one search, for example, looked like this: psychotropic site:http://www.djj.state.fl.us/qa/reports/residential).

The reports showed, among other things, that jailed children had fallen victim to repeated medication errors and, in at least one case, a falsification of medication logs. They also revealed that kids were put on mind-altering drugs without their parents' consent.

Gary Coronado | Palm Beach Post

Many juveniles in Florida state custody were 'chemically restrained' with antipsychotic drugs, some without their parents' consent. One in three of the prescribing doctors had received money from the companies that made the drugs.

Ensure accuracy

Armed with all of this information, I went looking for perspective from child advocates and juvenile justice workers, both from within Florida and from other states. It was still hard to shake the nagging feeling that this was wasn't anything so unusual, that people would learn about this stuff and shrug.

That didn't happen. I called lawyers, juvenile justice consultants, child advocates, former state employees, top medical ethicists and former child inmates. All of them had the same reaction: This was not how things were supposed to work.

In contacting people, I found one helpful tactic was getting the message out on listservs and email groups run by child lawyers and advocates. Within a few hours of asking a sympathetic lawyer to post a message about the story, a flood of emails and telephone calls poured in from across the country. The broad sweep added valuable context and reinforced the sense that the stories' conclusions were on the money.

Before publication, Breaking News Editor Rick Christie challenged each of the key points, making sure they were airtight. Next, *The Post*'s math geek and computer wizard, Adam Playford, double-checked the databases and analysis for accuracy.

The stories ran on a Sunday and Monday, and they stirred things up even before hitting newsstands. The juvenile justice department opened a still-ongoing probe into its use of antipsychotic drugs, the first review of its kind in the agency's history, and state Medicaid fraud investigators are asking questions of their own.

In the end, what elevated this story from an interesting weekender to a strong series was a willingness to keep reaching around in the dark until things made sense.

Each answer led to more questions: Why were so many kids getting drugs? Who were the doctors writing the prescriptions? Eventually, a picture emerged of a poorly monitored and potentially harmful set of practices.

Michael LaForgia is a reporter on the investigative team at The Palm Beach Post.

SUSPICIOUS VISAS

High foreign enrollment triggers investigation of unaccredited schools

By Lisa M. Krieger
San Jose Mercury News

One student offered some great insights and quotes – he felt misled and angry because he had lost thousands of dollars, gotten nothing and was now back in India, unemployed.

For $10,000 a year, poor youths from rural India can study engineering or business in the heart of Silicon Valley, just down the road from the sparkling campuses of Google, Facebook, Intel and Cisco.

But that degree won't actually land them a job at any of these places. In fact, as they quickly discover, any lawfully held job is elusive. And their courses aren't accepted, for transfer, by any local universities – the only real route to a tech career.

What did enrollment in unaccredited schools such as Herguan University, International Technological University and Tri-Valley University accomplish? For international youth, entry into America, through the student visa system. For the universities, boatloads of money.

Last January's raid by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents at Pleasanton's Tri-Valley University – which shut down the school, left 1,500 students in legal limbo and sparked violent protests – made local headlines. This was followed by a substantial follow-up by the Chronicle of Higher Education, which identified some other schools that seemed suspect.

For the *San Jose Mercury News*, the raid demanded answers to these questions: How did the students get here? Were there other schools in the San Francisco Bay Area – a mecca for tech-savvy international kids who have few prospects at home – that followed similar business models? Where were the authorities?

My three-month investigation, "Universities – Or Visa Mills?" revealed that two local schools – San Jose's International Technological University and Sunnyvale's Herguan University – have built lucrative businesses by assembling student bodies comprised almost entirely of student-visa holders.

Yet neither of the schools met the two necessary federal criteria: accreditation or transfer-worthy coursework. Officials at both schools say they have done nothing wrong and expect to be accredited soon.

Students are easy targets. Arriving unprepared, with little money, poor English skills and weak academic backgrounds, many believe naively that if they can just get to Silicon Valley, they'll find a tech job.

The government is also to blame, I found. A decade after terrorists in the country – some on student visas – carried out the Sept. 11 attacks, the Department of Homeland Security endorses universities that should be ineligible to issue the necessary certificate for students to gain F-1 student visas, records showed. It even places these schools on the list that international students consult before pursuing a degree in the United States.

This wasn't a story about mere "diploma mills." It was, instead, a look into possible "visa mills," where businesses exploit America's student visa system to recruit ill-prepared and then desperate, angry students.

It was a tough story to write because even its victims – international kids at risk of deportation – had no interest in talking. A few responded defensively to Facebook messages, saying "Please do not spoil the image of U" or "I think we are safe and sound here."

So we started out seeking to learn more about the inner business mechanics of TVU and perhaps the other schools, as well, that were contained in a legal complaint by the U.S. Attorney's Office. Later, we got a copy of the indictment.

The Tri-Valley students had scattered like the wind.

But it was possible to eavesdrop, thanks to the Internet. The raid on Tri-Valley ignited debate on discussion forums. So I started tracking the back-and-forth debates on immigration-focused forums, including the MurthyForum or Trackitt, or regional forums, like Topix. Even campus reviews on Yelp proved illuminating.

Shortly after the TVU raid, discussion threads such as "How Do I Stay?" and "Worried!!!!" popped up, soon joined by "Scammed by TVU," "Fraud!" and then "Apply To Herguan?"

For a long time, I just watched, and read, as students from Hyderabad and Calcutta advised each other. ("You can get an F-1, and just study online," said one.) This gave me a sense of student strategies – and showed that other universities were offering visas to desperate TVU students, for a fee.

To connect with these students, I registered for the forums – as a member, you can reach other members who have included their email in their registration profile. Their emails opened the door to a better understanding of how TVU operated. One particular TVU student offered some great insights and quotes – he felt mislead and angry because he had lost thousands of dollars, gotten nothing and was now back in India, unemployed.

Our global email exchanges also raised new questions. How did they hear about these Silicon Valley schools? The answer: international recruiters, hired in India by the schools to build a pipeline to their campuses.

And why, on earth, did they think the schools were legitimate? Their answer was startling: Because the U.S. government said they were. Here I discovered that they were on the Department of Homeland Security's so-called SEVIS list of approved schools. (SEVIS is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System.) Even TVU was on the list, as its boxes and computers were being hauled out the door by federal immigration agents.

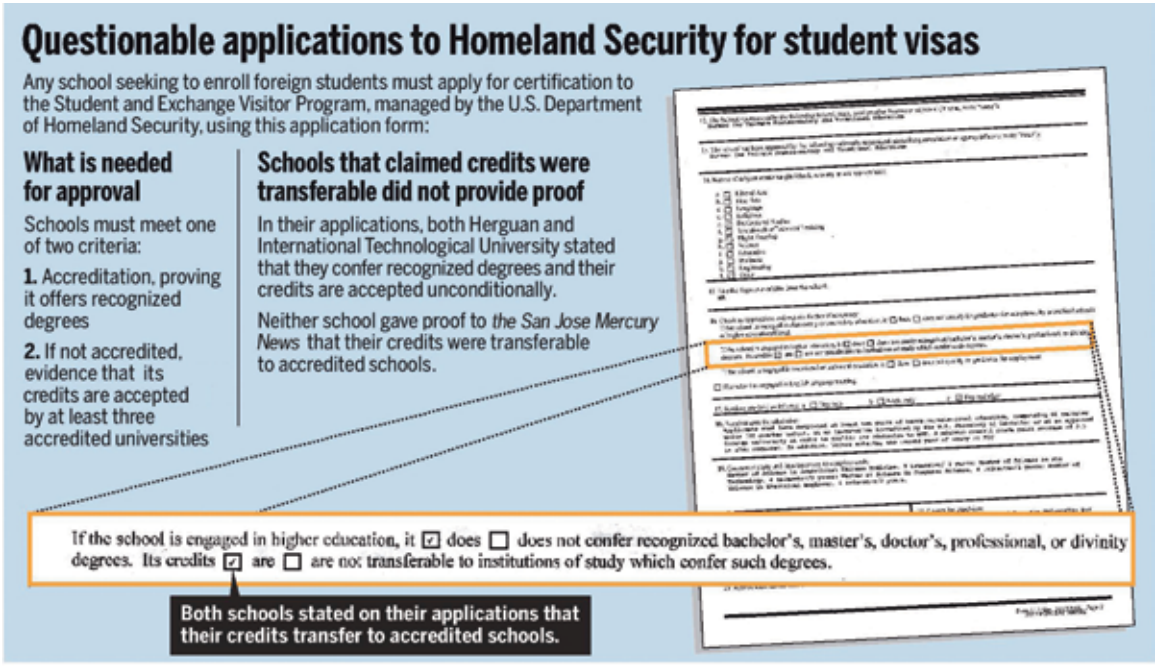
How could that be? How could such schools be approved to educate foreign students?

It was time to dive into federal regulations. An Internet search turned up the rules of SEVIS, which outlined what schools needed to do to become certified. The rules were complicated and sometimes contradictory. But at least I knew what the general standards were. For further clarification, I corresponded with the department's press office.

Armed with that information, I was ready to visit the schools – so I could see for myself if they met federal standards. (Rather than being too inquisitive or combative, I pitched both trips simply as a get-acquainted session.)

I already had seen their websites, which made claims that were easy to verify. For instance, ITU's site asserted that one alumnus "went on to become a cardiology resident at Stanford Medical School." Once I got the alumnus's name, I could do a simple search of Stanford's database of students and staff. He turned out to be a mere postdoc, employed in a lab.

The visit to Herguan University involved only two quick trips.



I was rebuffed the first time, although an employee handed me a cell phone number. This person became a useful source. The second time, while waiting, I got a glimpse of a wall decorated with photos and commendations from elected officials. This added nice color to the piece. Rather than obviously taking notes, I just dictated observations into a small tape recorder – it resembled a cell phone. Then, a university representative simply handed me a written statement: "There will be no personal interviews." I was escorted to the door.

ITU was much more forthcoming, as they recently had expanded their campus and wanted to show it off. Again, the tape recorder was invaluable, as officials made exaggerated assertions during the tour that they later tried to deny.

The trips convinced me that both schools fell short of federal criteria. So my question remained: Why were their students issued visas? I concluded that they must have submitted persuasive paperwork – and that the feds had never bothered to verify the claims.

The next stop was to read what they had submitted to Homeland Security. Five weeks after submitting a public-records request, I got my answer: proof that both schools falsified statements on their SEVIS applications. Both stated that they conferred recognized degrees, and one even claimed to be accredited.

Despite this evidence, DHS was unhelpful. Had either school been audited? I asked. Were they under investigation? Had any officials actually tried to verify the information on the applications? Their answer: "We don't discuss the status of individual schools."

A second records request, this time to California's Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education, was modestly useful. This agency essentially licenses schools to operate but does not accredit them. Within its piles of paperwork were the names of universities' board members, as well as the schools' promotional ads in Indian and Chinese newspapers.

Meanwhile, I did a database search to check their accreditation history. The Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs (www.ope.ed.gov/accreditation) database showed that Herguan was unaccredited, and that ITU had once been accredited, but lost its status.

What about their financials? Internal Revenue Service 990 forms from Guidestar.org helped. They showed me the soaring revenues at both campuses, as well as salaries of top officials. ITU's president earned more than $400,000 a year – more than the chancellor of University of California, Berkeley.

At the same time, the schools asserted that their students landed at other universities and tech companies. But they failed to provide names of places that actually accepted their coursework. So I called the admission offices of six other Bay Area campuses, but nobody wanted their credits. To verify that their students were hired by local tech companies, I called human resources at places like Intel. Only one student, of thousands, had landed there.

Meanwhile, the Indian media were riveted by the TVU meltdown, giving it far more play than the American press had. Through Nexis, I followed the outrage in media including *The Times of India*, *Hindustan Times* and *India Abroad* – and the anguished "article commenting" that followed.

This Indian coverage, read through Nexis, provided something even more important: a human casualty. Coverage of the TVU case included a reference to an earlier death of a young man named Prasthanth Goinaka, shot to death while working at an Oklahoma convenience store while enrolled at San Jose's ITU.

He became a symbol of all that could go wrong when young foreign students come to the United States, penniless and lured by the offer of a visa and diploma.

How could I learn his story? One article comment offered a clue: "due 2 financial prbs he desperately needed a job. But I NEVER expected this would happen 2 him. But he did wat he had to. R.I.P love u alwys." I followed up, using Goinaka's Facebook page, in an effort to find his Indian friends.

Finding his parents, a working-class Hyderabad family, proved hopeless. But another Web search showed that an Indo-American organization had raised money to return his body to India.

This was another good break: The group knew his story and was anxious to close down the schools. This community of worried Indo-Americans provided great material for quotes.

While our coverage triggered debate in the educational and immigration communities, there has been no federal crackdown. ITU is taking steps toward accreditation; Herguan shows no such evidence. Both are still busy recruiting.

Lisa M. Krieger is higher education writer for the San Jose Mercury News.

While our coverage triggered debate in the educational and immigration communities, there has been no federal crackdown.

ROGUE TEACHERS

Survey finds cheating in Michigan classrooms

By Chastity Pratt Dawsey and Kristi Tanner
Detroit Free Press

... teachers have a better chance of being hit by lightning while administering a test than seeing their students' scores increase so much ...

It's hard to catch teachers who cheat. It's even harder to get them to confess. This past spring, the *Free Press* conducted a survey that found that about 8 percent of educators in Michigan say they changed grades inappropriately within the last school year. At least 8 percent also admitted to some form of cheating to improve a student's state standardized test score.

The idea for a survey came about after months of analyzing data on schools suspected of cheating because of statistically improbable jumps in test scores.

The *Free Press* analyzed millions of Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) scores in collaboration with *USA TODAY*. We used open-records laws to obtain state standardized test scores. Michigan Education Department test-score data revealed 32 schools in metro Detroit where scores improved between 2008 and 2009 at a statistically improbable rate. We compared year-to-year changes in students' test scores and singled out grades within schools for which the gains were three standard deviations or more from the average statewide gain on a test. That means those schools' students performed better than 99.9% of students in the same grade statewide. Deviations of one or two are remarkable, but those three or higher are virtually impossible to get through improved instruction alone, our experts said.

The schools that grabbed our attention had standard deviations of four or five. To put this into perspective, teachers have a better chance of being hit by lightning while administering a test than seeing their students' scores increase so much from one year to the next.

Further, we requested student-matched information so that we could trace the up-and-down performance of individual students. Scores were matched using a student's unique identification number. Then, we asked the state Education Department for erasure data and found some of the schools also had high erasure rates – the number of times per test a student erases an answer and changes it from wrong to right.

To be fair, we filtered out schools with small class sizes, or other inadequate year-to-year data to compare, and schools that had closed. Next, we had four experts – test auditors and statisticians – review the year-to-year scores and erasure rates. Every one we talked to suspected cheating.

Then, we encountered a report about an online Arizona State University survey published last year in the scholarly research journal Education Policy Analysis Archives. That online survey found more than half of the 3,000 respondents reported that they had engaged in some form of cheating and knew colleagues who cheated. They recounted 19 ways to cheat.

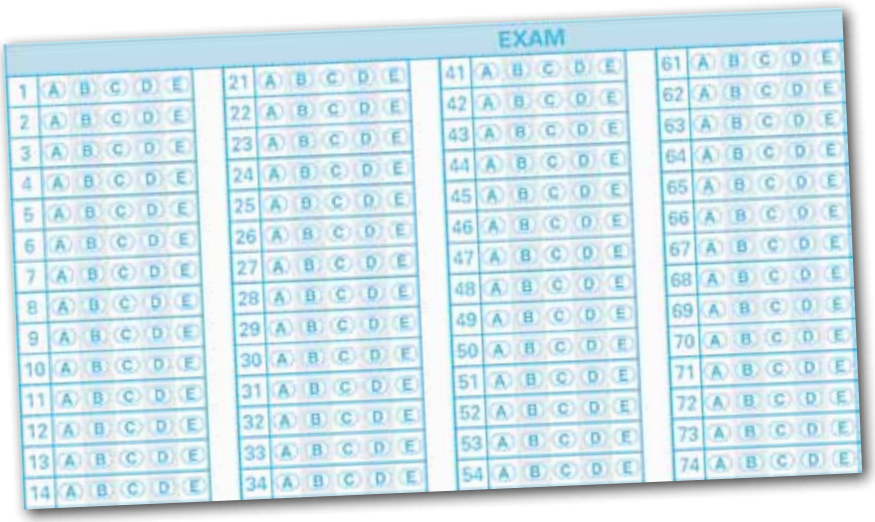
After months of reviewing and sorting Michigan data, it was time to take the data back to the schools to ask for explanations.

One teacher anonymously confirmed testing irregularities at a charter school that the state Education Department had discovered in 2008. She told our reporter that educators reviewed the test booklets before test day and answered student questions about the test questions during testing. But the teacher never confessed that the charter school staff knew they were cheating. The state invalidated the test scores (prior to our report). And all of the other teachers and administrators involved had left the school – except our anonymous source. No one else interviewed at our suspect schools came close to confessing. In fact, Detroit Public Schools lauded the improbable increases in test scores as proof that something was going right in classrooms.

So, the best we could do was to report that the statistically unlikely test scores and high erasure rates point to suspected cheating. Our experts recommended that the schools be investigated.

About a month after the series ran, the state released 2010 test results that showed that scores fell at the schools we had identified with the highest test score increases. Did these kids really go from performing at one rate in 2008 to performing far better in 2009, only to perform much worse in 2010?

Doubtful. Now what? We decided to go the Arizona State Uni-



versity route and survey teachers online anonymously.

First, we sought a similar survey to which to compare our expected results. We found a newspaper that had worked with a local teachers union to distribute a short survey to teachers. However, the newspaper was reluctant to confirm the questions that it used.

Having struck out there, we next requested the exact questions that Arizona State University used to survey educators. Then, we asked for contact information for members of Michigan's largest teachers unions: the Michigan Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers-Michigan and the Detroit Federation of Teachers. The unions instead agreed to directly email members – which included counselors and a variety of other job categories – a link to our survey.

The Michigan Educator Survey was a 19-item questionnaire about the prevalence of grade-fixing and cheating on standardized tests in Michigan public schools. It was voluntary, so the results cannot be generalized to all educators in Michigan.

It was administered in May and June 2011. The AFT and MEA emailed the survey to about 51,000 educators statewide. The DFT posted a link on its website. The number of respondents who completed the entire survey was 3,083. The participation rate was about 6 percent. The Arizona study had a participation rate of about 5 percent.

We used an online tool – SurveyMonkey – to design the questionnaire. The survey collected biographical information on the educators and asked which forms of cheating they observed among peers and which forms of cheating they committed.

Also, we were able to see how many respondents got through the entire survey. The dropdown boxes in the survey allowed educators to select information – such as their title, years of experience, school location and whether their schools were high poverty. This avoided fill-in-the blank responses.

The most telling part of the questionnaire was the open-comment field. More than 1,000 of the respondents left comments. Some were long-winded critiques of testing in general, while others described cheating incidents in schools. It led to conversations in the newsroom about how to use the comments because they amounted to unfounded allegations from anonymous sources. However, some respondents sent us their names and contact information and even called us. Jackpot – almost. The teachers we contacted did not confess on the record. However, a few gave good interviews to back up the survey results.

The results in the Michigan Educator Survey were similar to the Arizona State University survey. In both surveys, educators reported that among the top methods for cheating on standardized tests are encouraging students to redo problems and copying key information to teach students the next year.

The survey took a couple of weeks to design. It was available to respondents for about a month. It took about two more weeks to calculate and summarize the results.

If we had it to do over, we'd resend the survey one or two more times during the survey period to try to net more respondents. Also, a reporter with a month or so to beat the pavement could scour the open-comment responses and follow all of the leads from educators who describe alleged cheating incidents.

Chastity Pratt Dawsey covers education for the Detroit Free Press. Kristi Tanner is an analyst/reporter for the Free Press.

Wendy Gray | IRE

PROTECTING CONSUMERS: The government claims it's looking out for consumers, but often it takes a journalist to expose problems and spur action.

Tools, tactics

Help reporters expose fraud

By Jackie Callaway
WFTS-TV, Tampa

The down economy dealt out difficult challenges and plenty of opportunity for consumer journalists. Now your inbox has become a bull's-eye for an army of viewers/readers who wound up on the wrong side of a bad contract, lost their home or have been ripped off by any one of the endless schemes the bad guys create in the toughest of times.

Broadcasters may very well be adjusting to the world of shooting or editing some stories on their own and posting stories to the Web. Print journalists, too, find themselves juggling multimedia duties. Here are a few points to help you find balance, tame the consumer-beat beast and retain your sanity:

Organize, organize, organize

My world, like many of yours, would crash without a system. I am producing two or three quick turns during the week and a "deeper dive" every other week – all the while trying to build on more of a true investigation or two. Then, there's the new normal of posting stories for the Web and editing or shooting some pieces on my own. It is a chaotic but controlled juggling act.

A couple of tips:

- Maintain a record-keeping system of stories: quick turns and longer term. Create a case file with notes for every project in an electronic queue. I also label file folders for cases in which I am collecting documents that are not online or have not been scanned.
- File public records requests, gather interviews, get the ball rolling on the bigger pieces while working on the short-term and quick-turn stories.

Records, records, records

Have a constant flow of open records requests filed at all times. Most take just a few minutes to write and send. When they come in, you are all set for the quick turn of the day. In June, I requested all pending and approved rate increases involving property insurers in Florida. It took very little time, but I ended up with a story that gave homeowners a glimpse of the rate increase they would face at renewal time.

The piece popped the numbers and spiked traffic on our website: http://ow.ly/6pTOs.

Records requests to regulators in three states led to a quick-turn story about aviation. It informed travelers who fly in and out of Tampa from two major destinations about the accuracy of the luggage scales that determine if your bag is overweight. The piece is online at http://ow.ly/6pUcP.

One source of story ideas and background information is the web site of the National Consumer Law Center: www.nclc.org.

Online tools

Consumer reporters can benefit from using various Internet tools, including:

- Twitter advanced search, to find people within so many miles of your city: http://search.twitter.com/advanced
- Blog search: www.icerocket.com (type in your city to find local posts)
- Reporter's Desktop: easy-to-access research tools at www.reporter.org/desktop
- Finding people: www.pipl.com
- Social media search: www.whostalkin.com
- National Consumer Law Center: www.nclc.org
- Consumer World: provides links to more than 1,000 consumer-related websites at www.consumerworld.org
- Consumerist: blog-style consumer information at www.consumerist.com
- Consumer Affairs: thousands of consumer complaints at www.consumeraffairs.com

Mining tip line gold

Your voicemail and tip line may seem like a dumping ground for rambling callers, but it can be a priceless resource if managed correctly. A single tip from a local woman led us to discover a ring of phony locksmiths operating in the area: http://ow.ly/6pUnO.

A few ideas for managing the tips:

- Set up a database by subject so that you have go-to interviews when you need a hook or texture for a story on car deals gone bad, debt collectors, mortgage fraud and the like.
- Make sure your system is user-friendly, and then recruit help with the call backs. Maybe a newsroom intern can return calls, request documents and perform basic research. No interns? Check with HR, and then make a call to your local college's communications department. Students are dying for experience and a place to work on their resume reel.
- Use social media when looking for victims, characters or just plain input for a story you are working on. I will do this before I leave for the day, usually through Facebook. The next morning, I'm able to find a viewer or two with an interesting story to tell.

Sources and shortcuts

Beyond records, people are the key to a compelling story, whether in broadcast, print or online. Here are a few lessons:

- Get to know people outside the usual arena.
- Consumer attorneys: Get acquainted with at least two in your market. They can be great sources of information. They also can connect you with victims and are often willing to share their evidence for your visual needs.
- Liquidators: When a con man gets caught, it's often the liquidator who sells off the cars and jewels bought with victims' money. There may be one in your market who gets the job of selling the goods.
- Skype: With cost-cutting measures, bosses are not as willing as they once were to shell out money for satellite interviews. Phoners are no fun for broadcasters. Skype is a cheap and easy resource. Professionals usually have access to it.
- Skip the public information officer and go straight to the Economic Crimes Division. Most law-enforcement agencies have such units. These folks are sometimes willing to share cases they are working on as they often need your help in getting more victims.
- Team up and expand your reach. Make the most of your resources and cut down on the cost of your story by working with other stations owned by your company and affiliated with your network. Scripps stations are great at this and have exposed national issues such as Taser malfunctions and the fat in low-fat menus. You even could start a monthly email to exchange story ideas with those who do what you do in other markets.
- Consumer advocacy gold: Consumer advocacy groups can be a valuable resource. They track everything from changes in sinkhole insurance to the lawmakers are pushing bills to cut funding to your local consumer protection agency.
- Set up an RSS feed (such as Google Reader) so you have one place to search for the latest consumer stories each morning. It is a way to corral all your favorite sources of consumer news into one feed.

Jackie Callaway is the consumer reporter for ABC Action News (WFTS-TV) in Tampa.

Child products

Rolling investigation finds crib bumper pads can endanger babies

By Ellen Gabler
Chicago Tribune

There are few things more important to people than the health and safety of their children.

Frequent recalls of toys, cribs and clothes might make it seem like regulators keep a close eye on children's products. Yet, there are still many holes in the regulatory system and a tremendous need for watchful reporting.

In the last few years, the *Chicago Tribune*'s investigations of deadly products and the federal government's failure to protect children led to the biggest overhaul of consumer product safety laws in a generation. The reforms included mandatory testing for toys, more stringent limits on lead in kids' products and the toughest crib-safety standard in the world.

Like many good investigations across the country, the stories came about because reporters gained access to regulators' own documents and determined a danger had gone unnoticed or had been repeatedly ignored.

One of the *Tribune*'s most recent consumer product investigations began shortly after 7-week-old Preston Maxwell was found dead in his crib by his father. It was the spring of 2010, and Preston's dad found his infant son with his nose pressed between his crib mattress and the bumper pad, which wraps around the inside of a crib and ties to the slats.

The padded products have been a staple in babies' nurseries for years, making cribs look cozy and cute while giving parents a false sense their infants are safe.

Although some pediatricians and safety advocates have sounded an alarm for years that the products present a suffocation risk, the Consumer Product Safety Commission had not warned parents about the products, despite receiving reports of children's deaths. The agency said other factors may have played a role in the deaths, too.

Preston's death spurred some action, but not focused on bumpers. In addition to crib bumpers, a sleep positioner was in Preston's crib. The product had foam bolsters on the side and was used to keep babies from rolling. Preston rolled out of his and landed with his face against the bumper pad.

In September 2010, the Food and Drug Administration and Consumer Product Safety Commission issued a warning against sleep positioners and told retailers to pull them off the shelves. Preston and 11 other babies' deaths were linked to the products.

My colleague, Trish Callahan, and I wrote a quick, daily story about sleep positioners, warning parents not to use them. But a few days later, we found out that although a sleep positioner was in Preston's crib when he died, a medical examiner had determined the baby suffocated against the bumper pad in his crib.

family photo

Rhiannon holds son Aiden Lopez next to the crib where he was later found lifeless in Austin, Texas. The 6-month-old died this year after she discovered him with his face pressed against a crib bumper during his nap. A medical report said he suffocated.

... a pediatrician at Washington University in St. Louis had done a study using the safety agency's own files, citing 27 bumper-pad related deaths.

Michael Tercha

Laura and Kyle Maxwell play with daughter Emma, 2, in their Fayetteville, Ark., apartment. Emma prays for her baby brother, Preston, every night, her parents say. The boy died after rolling out of his sleep positioner and landing with his face between a crib bumper pad and mattress. Preston's autopsy report said he suffocated.

The safety agency still didn't warn parents about the possible dangers of bumper pads.

Trish, who had spearheaded the paper's earlier work investigating kids' products, was aware that bumpers could pose a suffocation hazard, but this was the first clear-cut case we knew about in which a medical examiner had determined the baby suffocated against a bumper pad.

That's when I started digging.

Reviewing the records

Gathering the right documents was the key to both stories in this investigation. But one story was published before I'd received all of the files on babies who had died.

In my initial reporting, I had been given a summary report of "sleep-related deaths" that was done by an official at the Consumer Product Safety Commission. The official was adamant that babies did not suffocate against bumper pads.

I read the report carefully. One section mentioned there were 52 reports of babies' deaths in which bumper pads were mentioned somewhere in the report. That didn't mean that the child necessarily suffocated against the bumper pad, just that the product was mentioned. But the report also said there were cases where babies were found with their face in a bumper pad. That sounded like it could be a suffocation, but the agency wouldn't provide more details. Officials also wouldn't tell us how many cases like that they had discovered.

A few years earlier, a pediatrician at Washington University in St. Louis had done a study using the safety agency's own files, citing 27 bumper-pad related deaths. The study and the pediatrician's concerns were essentially ignored, but it gave me insight into what information I could dig up.

I requested from the safety agency the complete file of each child's death to assess for myself how these children had died. Once again, my colleague's expertise in dealing with the agency came in handy – I requested up front that certain information be redacted because fighting for details like manufacturers' names could take as long as a year. Those names weren't relevant for this story anyway.

Agency officials said right away that they'd give me the 52 files for each babies' death, but weeks turned into a month or maybe two. I started asking general questions again to try to get officials to summarize those 52 deaths, so I could have some idea of how the children died. For example, how many children were found with their face against the bumper pad?

As it turned out, they couldn't give me a summary because they hadn't investigated all the deaths. It was time to write the first story, which basically said that the products have been a known hazard for years, but federal regulators have failed to warn parents and have failed to investigate all deaths associated with the product. This was important because products are often recalled after a number of deaths are linked to them. There's no magic number, but as deaths stack up, regulators sometimes take notice.

Before the story even ran, the agency said it would re-examine the safety of crib bumpers. That included reopening files on babies' deaths, evaluating the safety of bumper pads on store shelves and rethinking how investigators examine deaths where bumper pads are present.

Advancing the story

It took three and a half months to get all 52 files in which bumper pads were mentioned in a death report.

An important tip: Make sure to account for every file that government officials claim to have sent. At one point, I was missing 15 to 20 files. Some of the files they left out turned out to be the clearest cases of infant suffocations. It was difficult to tell which files were missing because they weren't all clearly numbered. Some were just death certificates or other pieces of paper with minimal information. But I pressed the agency repeatedly to sort out the problem within their own files. Eventually they did.

After receiving the files, I built a spreadsheet so I could easily see the circumstances of each child's death. Some deaths clearly had no connection to bumper pads – a baby was put in a broken crib and strangled to death, for example. But in at least a dozen cases, bumpers appeared to play a clear role. Then there were the 17 deaths that the safety agency had never examined.

We needed to figure out more about how these kids died.

The files from the safety agency were incomplete. Some reports of children's deaths were just death certificates. Others included autopsy reports or a single sheet from a medical examiner listing cause and manner of death.

Most of the babies' names and the names of their parents were redacted but some information remained: date of death, county, age of the child, birth date and gender, to name a few.

I tracked down the families of the children and documents associated with their deaths in a few different ways. By contacting medical examiners, I got autopsy reports based on the date of death and the age of the child. In most states, the name of the child was then public. Some medical examiners even remembered the child's death and spoke with me about what they or their investigators had found.

I found babies' obituaries online just by Googling, and then could track down their parents. Some were eager to talk. Others, understandably, were not.

Police reports also were important to help build a narrative. That's how I found out that the nanny of Madison Morr, of Rochester Hills, Mich., checked on her twice during her afternoon nap. The second time, Madison's skin was blue – and her face was pressed against the bumper pad that lined the inside of her crib.

A medical examiner found the 5-month-old baby had suffocated to death in 2006. Federal regulators had received a death certificate that said she had been trapped against padding in the corner of the crib. But they had never investigated.

Agency officials had said that one reason some cases weren't investigated was that they came to the agency's attention years after the tragedies occurred, making it difficult to re-create death scenes, interview parents and analyze products.

But it was still possible. All it took was a few phone calls for each case. That's how I found out about Alexis Ferguson, of Young America, Ind., who was found dead in her crib in 2003 with her face in a bumper pad, according to the Cass County coroner's office.

That same year, Jacent Jackson, of Detroit, was found with his face buried in a bumper pad. The 2-month-old baby's nose and mouth were completely blocked, according to a medical examiner's report.

I also re-examined cases that the safety agency had actually investigated. While other factors were often present, like a blanket or a pillow in the crib, there were many cases where bumper pads appeared to be primary contributors to a baby's death.

The industry that makes infant bedding has fought hard to continue selling their products. A trade group that represents bedding manufacturers and retailers said it has commissioned two of its own studies based on safety agency data, showing no link between bumper pads and babies' deaths. The group won't release the studies to the *Tribune*.

In early September, the Chicago City Council banned the sale of crib bumpers in Chicago. Maryland health officials proposed a similar ban later that month. In October, the American Academy of Pediatrics updated its official policy, stating that bumper pads should not be used. Federal regulators say they are still investigating the issue.

One of the common criticisms you hear when writing consumer product safety stories is parents' insisting that a particular product or product line must be safe because their child used it and wasn't hurt or killed. I always think of Preston Maxwell's dad. He said he knew that when people heard his story, they'd think what he thought: "That'll never happen to me."

Ellen Gabler is an investigative reporter at the Chicago Tribune. Coverage of the investigation of crib-bumper safety is at www.chicagotribune.com/bumpers.

Deadly wipes

Company with safety violations linked to contaminated product

By Raquel Rutledge and Rick Barrett
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

... we found the FDA was aware the company wasn't properly testing its water supply, that drugs that didn't meet specifications were tagged as acceptable, that equipment was dirty, and that products were left uncovered.

In early 2011, call after call came into the *Journal Sentinel* newsroom from current and former employees of one of the nation's largest manufacturers of alcohol wipes, describing filthy conditions at the plant in nearby Hartland: A worker had packaged the wipes with bloody hands. An owner drank coffee in the supposedly sterile production area.

Triad Group and its manufacturing arm, H&P Industries, had voluntarily recalled some lots of alcohol wipes out of contamination concerns. And in Texas, the parents of a 2-year-old boy blamed their son's death on contaminated wipes. Pieces of a story had started to emerge.

The calls continued.

When Shanoop and Sandra Kothari filed their lawsuit in February 2011, blaming Triad for their son's death, the story had been picked up in the Houston media, and MSNBC.com began investigating the issue.

But with Triad – a privately held company that had attracted little attention over the years – in our backyard, we were uniquely situated to provide depth to a developing story with major national implications. The accountability, we would find, fell at the doorstep of the plant and the Food and Drug Administration.

Opportunities to alert hospitals and clinics and the public to an emerging problem – common alcohol wipes contaminated with a potentially deadly bacteria – had been missed. Indeed, there is no public alert called for in such outbreaks, even when deaths occur. And the FDA had known of problems in the production facility for years but had not taken action against the company.

What's more, we later found that wipes were still in personal medicine cabinets – and major drug store chains couldn't confirm whether the products were still on their shelves – many months after the recall.

Triad has denied any ties between its products and the illnesses and deaths. The company has not commented on the recall effort because it's the subject of litigation.

To tell the story in a way that would resonate with readers, we broke the mold of our traditional investigative stories and wove the multiple elements into a single accountability narrative. We would work on that story but spin off shorter-term watchdog pieces and follow developments, such as when U.S. Marshals raided the plant in April, seizing $6 million worth of product and effectively shutting down the plant.

The stories are online at www.jsonline.com/shatteredtrust.

family photo

In a family photo, Shanoop Kothari holds daughter Hannah, while Sandra Kothari holds son Harrison.

Puzzling medical problems

Harrison Kothari was a healthy and typical 2-year-old when he was admitted to a Houston hospital for a low-risk surgery. He was recovering and was set to go home when he suddenly became ill on Nov. 29, 2010.

His father, Shanoop Kothari, was sitting by Harry's hospital bed when his son began throwing up and had a seizure. Within hours, Harry was brain dead. When the lab results came back, they showed his death was caused by *Bacillus cereus*. The bacterium is commonly found in the soil but can be deadly if it gets into the blood or spinal fluid. *Bacillus cereus* is a cousin to the much-feared *Bacillus anthracis*, or anthrax.

Weeks earlier, nurses at a hospital in Colorado had noticed strange infections cropping up among their patients. A child with leukemia became gravely ill after hospital workers implanted an IV port in his chest. Then, an infant with congenital heart disease developed a fever and was having trouble breathing a few days after doctors replaced an IV tube.

Blood cultures tested positive for *Bacillus cereus*.

Hospital workers launched an internal investigation, trying to determine what the patients had in common in terms of items and equipment that came into contact with them. The hospital eventually found Triad's alcohol wipes – used to clean the skin before injections and incisions – were contaminated with the bacterium.

They notified the Colorado Health Department, but officials there didn't contact the FDA or the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention until the following week. And it would take another six weeks for Triad and the FDA to recall the wipes.

That timeline gave us a framework of accountability and became a reporting tool – one we ultimately shared with readers using the TimelineSetter software developed by ProPublica. Using the timeline helped us identify not only holes in the system, but also key points of impact for our narrative.

For instance, as Harry lay unconscious, FDA inspectors were descending on the plant in Wisconsin in search of the bacterium that was ravaging Harry's body. It's one thing to note the delay in the Colorado Health Department contacting the FDA and the CDC. It's another to be able to show the impact of that delay in stark, human terms.

But the timeline provided only a framework of what had gone wrong in the short term. We dug much deeper.

We wrote a short-term story that highlighted the concerns by current and former workers about cleanliness in the manufacturing plant, establishing that warnings had been ignored for years. However, it wasn't until we received FDA documents that we could establish just how far back those concerns were clear.

We requested inspection reports detailing the agency's visits to the plant dating to 2000. The agency provided them, but with heavy redactions. They showed investigators had found the company wasn't following proper procedures to sterilize wipes in May 2010, but took no enforcement action. Instead, they accepted the company's promise to correct the problem.

That followed a pattern from earlier inspections. A close look at the reports showed FDA inspectors repeatedly found serious violations of good manufacturing practices at Triad's plants. For instance, we found the FDA was aware the company wasn't properly testing its water supply, that drugs that didn't meet specifications were tagged as acceptable, that equipment was dirty, and that products were left uncovered. The FDA was also aware that suppositories had

been contaminated with metal shavings.

Never once did the agency – tasked with protecting public health – issue even a warning letter, demanding improvement.

In June 2011, FDA officials admitted they should have taken a tougher stand with Triad in 2010.

Since the recall began, the FDA has received reports of at least 11 deaths and hundreds of injuries that may be tied to Triad's products. But since the agency says the recall is ongoing, it has refused to release reports showing whether the effort has been effective.

Delays and redactions

We learned early on that dealing with the FDA is much like dealing with other federal agencies. You have to be more aggressive than usual and stay on top of all FOIA and interview requests.

The agency's response to a number of our requests was incomplete. We had to separately pursue records from the regional offices and hound the press liaisons for interviews with top department officials.

In addition, the agency redacted key information from the inspection reports, claiming it was considered a trade secret or confidential information. As standard practice, the agency even redacted the name of the bacteria found on the wipes and other products, citing the same exemption – as if the bacteria were some sort of secret ingredient in the wipes. With our attorney, as our deadline approached, we challenged key redactions – including that one. After our appeal, the agency lifted some of the redactions, which revealed the metal shavings in the suppositories and, importantly, confirmed the bacteria in question was *Bacillus cereus*. Appealing a limited number of redactions expedited the process.

We are still seeking additional records.

The release of the new information came the Friday before our publication, which required some late rewriting – but it meant we could write with even more authority.

One of the challenges of this story was that it was investigative in nature, with numerous accountability angles, but it was also the personal story of a family's horrible loss. We viewed the story in terms of key scenes and wrote it in chapters, which we rearranged several times for maximum impact. Some key information, including that Harry had died, was not included until later in the story, building tension and suspense. The story opened with a narrative scene (Harry's hospital room as he took ill), which we broke in the middle and then returned to later. So the writing took a risk – which our editors encouraged – and it paid off by engaging the readers and leading them through a complicated story.

A separate box highlighted key points and findings, so they would not be lost.

We had incredible material to work with as the Kothari family was very open and generous with their time, walking us through the events of Harry's short life and his final moments.

In addition, employees of Triad provided detailed accounts of what went on inside the manufacturing plants. Some of the best details came from documents, but others from workers.

Mike DeSisti | Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Shanoop Kothari stands in his former home in Houston. He and his wife, Sandra, sold the home after the death of their 2-year-old son. In a lawsuit, they blame the Wisconsin-based manufacturer of alcohol wipes.

Workers also provided context, saying how the company focused mainly on the bottom line and admonished employees when they raised concerns about safety. We heard from workers who had been at different plants in a variety of departments spanning more than 10 years. Their stories were corroborated by other workers and by FDA inspection records. The company allowed a sit-down interview with an owner early in the process, and then it responded to written questions later.

Since the story ran, we have continued our work.

We learned that the company that many hospitals and drug stores turned to after Triad's wipes were recalled also had a troubled manufacturing history. We searched the FDA's records and learned that company had recently recalled wipes, so we are pursuing more documents.

In that same story, we revealed how the FDA refused to release the recall audit reports, making it impossible to assess how effective the recall was. One area woman had wipes in her medicine cabinet six months after the recall but got the runaround from the FDA when she called to ask whether they were part of the recalled lots. They were. Simple changes to the bar-code tracking system, experts said, could mean a more efficient recall process, both from stores and within hospitals and clinics.

The calls from potential sources, of course, have continued.

And so has our reporting.

Raquel Rutledge is an investigative reporter for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and a Pulitzer Prize winner for her coverage of day care fraud in Wisconsin. She currently is a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. Rick Barrett is a business reporter for the Journal Sentinel. "A Case of Shattered Trust" won the silver award in this year's Barlett & Steele Awards in Investigative Business Journalism.

PROTECTING CONSUMERS: Simple changes … could mean a more efficient recall process, both from stores and within hospitals and clinics.

IRE Resources

Stories

No. 24372: Michael Moss, Gabe Johnson and Andrew Martin, *The New York Times*. "Food Safety," a series of periodic reports, found that the food industry's drive for cheaper ingredients has increased the risk to consumers. Also, the federal agencies that monitor the food industry have flaws that undermine their efforts. (2009)

No. 24651: Susan Koeppen, Audrey Gruber, Elizabeth Bohnel, Laura Berger, Lindsey Pritzlaff and Zev Shalev, CBS News (New York). "Crib Recall" broke the news of the nation's largest crib recall, involving 2.1 million drop-side cribs. (2009)

No. 23840: Nate Carlisle, *The Salt Lake Tribune*. "Undetected Danger" reported on carbon monoxide detectors that fail to sound. A Utah man died when a detector that was not marine-certified did not sound in his houseboat. (2008)

Tipsheets

No. 3287: "Consumer Investigations for Tough Times," Jackie Callaway, WFTS-Tampa; Jim Strickland, WSB-Atlanta; McNelly Torres, freelance writer; Matt Meagher, "Inside Edition." This extensive guide to consumer investigations offers story ideas, ways to manage tips and find sources, and several pages of websites and phone numbers for covering the consumer beat.

No. 3579: "Using Testing in Your Stories," Ellen Gabler, Joanna Lin and Andrea Rock, *Chicago Tribune*. The authors describe the strong impact that testing can bring to an investigative story. They explain how to determine what to test and how to test it, how to choose a testing device, how to keep costs low and how to select a sample size.

The IRE Journal

"Water Worries: Aging Water System Flows with Contamination; Little Official Oversight of Costs, Maintenance." *Wisconsin State Journal*. Ron Seely tells how he investigated the Madison Water Utility and found numerous contaminants, including viruses, in the aquifer from which the city draws its drinking water. He uncovered a utility that wasn't spending enough to replace aging water pipes, wells and other infrastructure – problems facing other utilities across the country. (January/February 2007)

"Mercury Connection: State Tests Water And Fish But Not People Who Eat the Catch." *The* (Charleston, S.C.) *Post and Courier*. Tony Bartelme and Doug Pardue collected hair samples from volunteers and found seafood eaters with high levels of mercury. The state had warned people about safe levels of mercury but in three years had used its mercury-testing equipment on just one member of the public. (January/February 2008).

Extra! Extra!

"Lion Meat, Anyone?" Public Radio International. "Living on Earth's" Ike Sriskandarajah found lion meat on the shelf at his neighborhood butcher and pursued the trail into the exotic meat trade. He learned that this trade is murky and somewhat illegal and that we can eat almost anything. (Consumer Safety, Government, Health, International, Week of May 20, 2011)

"A Matter of Risk: Radiation, Drinking Water and Deception," KHOU-Houston. In a one-hour special, Mark Greenblatt of KHOU-TV revealed how Texas and U.S. authorities let the public drink water with more radioactive contamination than is allowed by federal law. (Consumer Safety, Environment, Government, Health, Sept. 6, 2011)

PROTECTING CONSUMERS: IRE has many resources to help you keep consumers in your area informed about product safety and much more.

You're reading a featured story from Uplink, IRE and NICAR's online publication devoted to computer-assisted reporting – available by subscription at http://data.nicar.org/uplink.

Scouring MAUDE data to find faulty metal hips

By Janet Roberts
The New York Times

New York Times reporter Barry Meier knew lawsuits against the manufacturers of all-metal artificial hips were on the rise. But it wasn't until I queried a balky Food and Drug Administration database that he was able to confirm that all-metal hip implants were quickly becoming the biggest and costliest medical implant problem since Medtronic recalled a widely used heart device in 2007.

The FDA collects voluntary reports from patients, health care providers and medical device manufacturers about problems experienced with specific devices. The agency compiles the reports of deaths, injuries and product malfunctions in a database known as MAUDE, short for the Manufacturer and User Facility Device Experience Database.

MAUDE is searchable on the FDA's website, at www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cdrh/cfdocs/cfmaude/search.cfm, but it is difficult, if not impossible, to get a valid sense of how many devices have gone bad simply by querying MAUDE online. You can't get a precise figure from the raw data, either, but you can tease a qualified figure from the database, if you know its quirks and caveats.

Before diving in, it's important to understand that MAUDE cannot provide a definitive count of failed medical devices. First, hospitals and doctors are not required to report problem devices to the agency, so any count produced from MAUDE represents an unknown percentage of faulty products. The best you can do is count the number of *reported* problems.

You'll also need to forget about doing geographical and demographic analyses of the data. The data does not identify medical facilities that report problems, nor does it contain any information about their location. Patient demographics, including race, age and gender, are redacted to protect privacy.

Even dates are sketchy. The "event date," or the date the problem with the device occurred, was missing for more than 16 percent of the records I examined. For our analysis, I used the report date, which reflects when the FDA was alerted to the problem.

The MAUDE database contains four tables:

- a main table listing more than 1.8 million reports, the dates they were received and key IDs used in counting records and joining them to the other tables
- a device table that contains specifics on the device in question
- a patient table that flags deaths and other outcomes
- a text table that includes a text description of the incident

Our goal was to find out how many reports the FDA had received about four specific models of hip implants, produced by three different device manufacturers. All four implants were "metal-on-metal," in which a metal ball rubs against a metal cup or socket.

Isolating three of the four devices in the data was somewhat straightforward; the fourth proved to be a bear.

My first step, using Microsoft SQL Server database manager, was to examine the myriad ways each manufacturer's name was entered into the database. One of the headaches of MAUDE is that none of the names are standardized. The name of DePuy Orthopaedics, the manufacturer of two of our targeted hip implants, appears in the data more than 700 different ways. I was able to use a filter – WHERE manufacturername LIKE '%puy%' – to grab all of the company's records.

Next, I looked for the specific hip models in question. The device table contains both a brand name field and a generic name field. They are not always used as their names would imply. Always query both. I used GROUP BY queries initially, which helped me find the various ways the hip device was listed in the database. For example, I started out searching for Biomet's "Magnum" implant, but learned in doing GROUP BY queries that its official name is the "M2A Magnum." In the MAUDE database, sometimes it is listed simply as "M2A."

I had to play with the filters to include the targeted devices but exclude unwanted devices with similar names. Further complicating the filtering was the presence of NULL values in the device name fields. It's important to account for those nulls, or your query will omit desired records. For the Magnum hip, my filter became:

```
WHERE manufacturername LIKE 'bio_et%'
AND (brandname like '%magnum%' OR genericname LIKE '%magnum%'
OR brandname LIKE '%m2a%')
AND (brandname IS NULL OR brandname NOT LIKE '%c2a%' AND brandname NOT LIKE '%scapula%')
```

Despite days of trying, I never found an accurate way to isolate one of our four devices, DePuy's Pinnacle all-metal implant. DePuy makes some versions of the Pinnacle hip with ceramic and plastic parts, and it proved impossible to separate those from the all-metal versions in the MAUDE database.

An important side note: Do some research on the devices you are targeting and understand how they are used. I thought I had found a way to isolate all-metal Pinnacle hips after Google searches yielded DePuy product catalogs that listed model numbers. This allowed me to query against the model number field in MAUDE's device table and to isolate Pinnacle metal balls and cups. However, further research showed that doctors sometimes use a Pinnacle metal ball with a ceramic or plastic cup, and it was impossible to tell from the data when that was the case.

The text table came in handy in this instance, as I did find more than 500 instances in which the text of the report described the faulty device as a Pinnacle metal-on-metal hip. We included those records

CONTINUED ON PAGE 34

Journalists around the globe are producing high-quality investigative stories that make a difference. Their experiences offer lessons as well as inspiration.

CROWDSOURCING CRIME NEWS

Interactive website in Panama connects citizens and journalists

By Jorge Luis Sierra

The reporters found that there were no lights at the bridge, a police street camera was not working, police scarcely patrolled the area, and the two cities were blaming each other over who was responsible for the unsafe situation.

A resident of Dorasol, a neighborhood at the border of Panama City and San Miguelito, was among dozens of victims of robberies committed by youth gang members at the San Pedro pedestrian bridge that crosses the Via Tocumen, the highway between the two cities.

So on Oct. 14, 2010, he logged onto the website Mi Panamá Transparente (www.mipanamatransparente.com), which allows citizens to send anonymous reports on crime and corruption. He posted an anonymous report in Spanish, which, translated, said: "In the Via Tocumen pedestrian bridge, close to the San Pedro housing project, people cannot cross over the bridge after 6 p.m. because a gang of minor criminals is committing armed robberies to those who dare to use the bridge. We don't have any other option than to risk crossing the highway."

A reporter working for the project visited the location and interviewed people. In order to avoid crossing the crime-plagued bridge, employees of a nearby car shop had been taking a bus going the opposite way, leaving them at a safer bridge. Then they took a different bus in the right direction toward home.

That was the beginning of an investigation published by *La Prensa*, the biggest newspaper in Panama, on June 6, 2011. The reporters found that there were no lights at the bridge, a police street camera was not working, police scarcely patrolled the area, and the two cities were blaming each other over who was responsible for the unsafe situation. In addition, two big billboards created a tunnel effect, blocking the view of the inside of the bridge and keeping pedestrians from knowing if gang members waited there for them.

After the story was published, Panamerican Outdoor, the company responsible for maintaining the bridge, put lights on it. National Police promised to deploy more officers to the area.

It's an example of how the Mi Panamá Transparente website is using the Ushahidi open-source platform to get citizen reports about crime and corruption. The free platform (www.ushahidi.com) helps to collect information from the public and visualize it on an interactive map. In the Panama project, anonymous tips serve as leads for investigative reporters working for three major newspapers (*La Prensa*, *La Estrella* and *Panama America*) and two TV stations (TVN and Medcom-Telemetro).

Information sent to the site via Internet and mobile phone texts is visualized on the Mi Panamá Transparente map and timeline chart. The website is a project of the Knight International Journalism Program, the main program of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), and has been supported by the Forum of Journalists of Panama and Transparency International-Panama. With a grant from the U.S. State Department, I, in my fellowship, and members of the Forum of Journalists traveled to the provinces and trained 112 Panamanian journalists to verify and investigate the incidents, as well as patterns of crime and corruption that emerge. As they did with the San Pedro bridge tips, the journalists have developed in-depth coverage based on the website's data and their own research.

Local media promote the website through visits to community groups and public-service announcements. The website has helped to establish patterns of daily acts of corruption and crime around the entire country. It's giving citizens with little official access or influence a way to make their voices heard.

It also seeks to improve the media's ability to cover these critical issues and bring them to official attention. The information on the website also may help policymakers and civic groups to improve crime-and-corruption policies by offering real-time, on-the-ground information that they can compare and contrast with official data.

By combining the forces of citizens, journalists and watchdog groups, this project is using the transformational powers of digital technology to gather and analyze data. In turn, that leads to pressure on officials to address corruption and crime and encourage accountability.

Panama has offered a promising environment in which to pilot this project. Perceived corruption in the country is among the highest in Latin America. Citizens are wary about reporting crime and corruption to the police. This breeds cynicism and a lack of engagement in the political process. The moment is ripe for change: The new government in Panama, which ran on a platform promising a crackdown on crime and corruption, has made little headway. Recently, authorities have introduced laws that appear to limit freedom of expression, both for the news media and average citizens.

Jorge Luis Sierra

Reporter Jahaira Valverde (left, in white blouse) interviews a citizen on the San Pedro pedestrian bridge, between Panama City and San Miguelito, Panama. Anonymous reports to mipanamatransparente.com led journalists to investigate crime on the bridge.

More than 300 citizens have sent reports either by using the website or by sending text messages to 5638, a short code connected with the site. The nature of incidents reported by Panamanian citizens during the past year is much more significant than the reports usually sent via email or phone to newspapers and TV stations. While the people usually send information about traffic violations to TV stations and newspapers, the website users are sending information about corruption, drug trafficking and gang violence.

This indicates, anecdotally, that citizens may feel a greater degree of security reporting these incidents to the website. The reason: The site offers anonymity to citizens, who may fear retribution for reporting incidents of crime and corruption. A trained journalist looks into the citizens' reports and indicates on the website which reports have been verified.

The website and the digital map enriched by citizen information have created an enormous potential for investigative reporting because more than half of the reports involve allegations of corruption. The training of Panamanian journalists in investigative reporting techniques and skills is particularly important to close the gap between the need for in-depth stories and the lack of professional capacity among journalists.

We are preparing to hold a workshop on investigative reporting in Panama. In addition, we've begun to replicate the website in Mexico and Colombia. With these developments, we think investigative journalists in Latin America may have an opportunity to build a strong connection with citizens and civic groups.

The Panama project got the attention of Transparency International, a global anti-corruption organization founded in 1993. It plans to build similar tools among its chapters all around the world. That tells us that we are working in the right direction.

Jorge Luis Sierra is a Knight International Journalism Fellow working in Latin America to develop crowdsourcing tools to track crime and corruption. He has been an investigative reporter for publications in Mexico and the United States, specializing in organized crime and national security.

While people usually send information about traffic violations to TV stations and newspapers, the website users are sending information about corruption, drug trafficking and gang violence.

www.ire.org

- Completely revamped IRE website
- Updated Educator's Center, including new practice data sets, tutorials and syllabi to help educators and students learning CAR and investigative skills
- Introducing story packs: Compilations of the best of our resources on specific topics, helping you quickly find the best tipsheets, stories and databases on some key topics
- Improved search functions for tipsheets and stories, making it easier to find the resources to help you do great journalism
- Personalized purchase history. Track IRE events you've attended, your membership history and more
- Selected videos of 2011 IRE Conference panels, including "60 Minutes'" Jeff Fager's keynote address

BORDER CROSSINGS

Student news project explores the 'Mexodus' to the El Paso region

By Lourdes Cardenas
Somos Frontera / El Paso Times

In mid-2008, the war between drug cartels in Mexico began to escalate in some border cities such as Ciudad Juárez, in the northern state of Chihuahua. At the same time, stories about a new wave of Mexican migrants fleeing the violence and taking refuge in the United States became frequent in the American news media.

Most of the stories approached the topic from an anecdotal perspective, describing the difficulties and challenges that many of these middle-class migrants were facing in their country and the process of adaptation to their new reality.

The stories described something evident to most people in El Paso, Tex.: A growing number of Mexican businesses – mostly restaurants and bars – were flourishing and changing the night scene of the city. Many of these businesses had closed their doors in Juárez and were looking for a new beginning in El Paso.

In early 2010, El Paso Police Chief Greg Allen ventured to give the first estimate of the magnitude of this migration. Without any hard data, he said that more than 30,000 Mexican nationals had moved to El Paso, fleeing the violence in Juárez. After the police chief's estimate, researchers from the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez (UACJ) released a study concluding that about 250,000 people fled Juárez between 2008 and 2010, and an estimated 124,000 had gone to El Paso.

That gap – huge and intriguing – became the starting point for a discussion between professor Zita Arocha of the University of Texas at El Paso and me. We talked about developing a student-journalism project to investigate the issue.

As the instructor for the UTEP class, I set the initial goal of analyzing the impact that migration was having on different trends in education, business development and related areas (such as asylums granted and visas and border crossing cards issued). I chose that specific approach as a way to get numbers from indirect sources, given the lack of official and reliable figures.

Most of the 10 students in the class were seniors with some experience in print media. At the time, many wrote for *The Prospector* – the student newspaper – and for Borderzine, the online student publication that hosted the entire project.

Assuming that many of the new migrants would have children, we analyzed El Paso public school enrollment trends from 2005 to 2011. We also incorporated numbers from El Paso's private schools. From the Texas Education Agency's databases, we built spreadsheets using enrollment numbers by school, academic year and ethnicity. We also incorporated the numbers of students enrolled in English as a Second Language programs and those labeled as Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

To our surprise, the enrollment numbers didn't show a significant jump. As a whole, El Paso Independent School District had an enrollment increase of no more than 600 students, which was the first relevant indication that the Mexodus was not significantly affecting the system. Other area districts, such as Ysleta and Socorro, showed a similar trend, although the last one had a bigger increase in its student population – about 3,000 – which authorities attributed to several factors, including the impact of Fort Bliss' expansion, internal migrations within the United States and to a lesser extent the arrival of children from Juárez.

However, looking at the ESL and LEP figures gave us an indication of which specific schools were dealing with the largest incoming flow of Mexican immigrants. From there, we developed stories on those schools, focusing on how teachers and students were dealing with the problems of language, trauma from the violence the students had experienced and the adaptation to a completely new system.

Another way to look at the schools was through the number of students who enrolled for an academic year in El Paso public schools but had registered in a Mexican school the previous year. To obtain that information, students in the class submitted several public information requests to the El Paso, Socorro and Ysleta school districts. However, their petitions were denied, as districts argued they don't keep a public record of that specific data. In that regard, private schools were more open to discussing the impact of the Mexican exodus in their classrooms.

One of the major difficulties when trying to document the migration in this area is, paradoxically, the constant movement of people that characterizes the border.

In the schools' cases, it is well known – but poorly documented with hard data – that hundreds if not thousands of children cross every day from Mexico to the United States to attend school. Many of these children live in Juárez, but come to school in El Paso. It has been this way for many years. It is likely that many of these families moved to El Paso when the violence worsened. But because the

Knowing the public records law helped students recognize immediately when they were getting jerked around.

Raymundo Aguirre | Borderzine.com

An estimated 124,000 people fled Ciudad Juárez for El Paso, Texas, between 2008 and 2010, according to the Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez. Students at the University of Texas at El Paso sought to gauge the impact of the migration.

For the students, it was a hands-on experience that allowed them to glance at some of the hardships of trying to measure the movement of people in an area as dynamic and interrelated as the border.

children already were enrolled in the schools, there was not any visible impact in the whole system when they moved to live on the American side of the border.

That could explain why the enrollment numbers didn't show significant increases.

For the project's business development facet, we tried to find the number of new businesses established in the El Paso area from 2007 to May 2011. Our main focus was restaurants and bars, because they were the most visible expression of the migration. It is well known that many businesses in Juárez had relocated to El Paso.

Some students were assigned to analyze databases of the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, which keeps property and license records for bars and restaurants. Others submitted public information requests to the Texas Secretary of State for records of the number of companies that had registered in the state by name of the company, owner or representative, type of business and contact information. Other students contacted La Red, a nonprofit organization that helps Mexican business owners network and support each other while launching new operations in El Paso.

Another component involved getting the most recent statistics from the U.S. State Department of the number of visas issued to Mexican entrepreneurs. We looked at E1 and E2 visas, as well as TN visas, which are better known as "NAFTA visas." The Bureau of Consular Affairs provides detailed and current information on this particular topic, including the activity of consulates by region and area.

As a result of these inquiries, we learned that more than 280 bars and restaurants got a license from the Texas commission between 2007 and 2011. The list included names and contact numbers, so the next step would have been to sort them out and identify, by phone or email, which of them were businesses coming from Juárez. Because of time constraints, the students were not able to go further. The same happened with the information provided by La Red, which gave us a complete list of its 347 affiliates and associates.

Regarding the visas, we were able to identify an upward trend in the number of applications and business visas issued. However, the numbers failed to support the notion of a big exodus of Mexicans to El Paso.

As we concluded in the analysis of the school trends, the border factor also played an important role. As we found out, many of the new businesses that had opened in El Paso were owned by people who used to live on both sides of the border. Many were American citizens with family ties in Juárez and in the United States. Many others had properties on both sides. Many more had U.S.-born children who were petitioning for them and trying to arrange their legal residence.

So when the violence arose and they moved to El Paso, they entered the country as regular citizens or regular green-card holders.

Perhaps the clearest indicator of Mexicans fleeing violence was asylum petitions, which reached 3,200 in 2010. However, the number of asylum petitions from Mexican nationals has fluctuated between 3,000 and 5,000 in the last decade.

Although we were not able to determine a conclusive number to measure the exodus of Mexicans to El Paso, we produced some clear indicators for analyzing the migration. Students produced more than 20 stories focused on education, business, immigration and the social and cultural impact of the city's new residents. The stories were published by *The El Paso Times*, *Minero Magazine*, Borderzine and other publications.

When working with students, the main limitations were time and focus. Mexodus was developed in four months. The large magnitude of the project would have required at least two semesters working with the data. For example, our public information request to the Texas Secretary of State was rejected twice, and there was not enough time to continue the process. On the other hand, students had the opportunity to learn and practice in a real situation the difficulties of submitting and following up with public information requests.

As journalism students, the participants also had to deal with real-world problems, such as not getting responses from official sources, protecting the identities of some of their sources and meeting deadlines. For the students, it was a hands-on experience that allowed them to glance at some of the hardships of trying to measure the movement of people in an area as dynamic and interrelated as the border.

The institutions participating in the Mexodus project were UTEP, California State University, Northridge, and the Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey, with campuses in Chihuahua and Mexico City. The project received support from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, Investigative Reporters and Editors and other organizations.

The complete project is hosted by Borderzine.com.

Lourdes Cardenas is a former professor at the University of Texas at El Paso. She now works as editor of SomosFrontera.com, a Spanish electronic publication of The El Paso Times.

Closed business at colonia Melchor Ocampo in Ciudad Juárez. Student reporters suspected that many businesses had closed in Juárez and relocated across the border, in El Paso.

To keep their watchdog teeth sharp, journalists need to stay connected with the latest news and trends about public records and open meetings at the federal, state and local levels.

IRE FOI Files

Reaction to 'fracking' investigation typifies journalists' challenges

By Charles N. Davis
Missouri School of Journalism

Journalists and journalism advocates rightly focus a great deal of energy on freedom of information law, defending the rights of the press and public to access governmental information. Attempts to control the press through legal means constitute a daily threat to democracy and must be met with systemic pushback.

Not all controls on information flow are legal, however. Indeed, non-legal controls, in the form of organized disinformation campaigns clothed as righteous indignation by institutions that find themselves in the crosshairs of investigative journalists, have become a growing problem.

It's a timeworn tactic: an investigative series is quickly followed by a vocal, masterfully orchestrated pushback from the subject.

Throw in a ton of money and the political promise of jobs in a tough economy, and the multiplier effect kicks in.

That's what we're witnessing in the industry reaction to *The New York Times'* series on "fracking" – the use of hydraulic fracturing to drill most natural gas wells. The series has broken new ground and already has spurred major changes in regulations at the state and federal level, yet it's been the subject of a highly organized assault since the moment it began.

The saga began after the newspaper ran a front-page story by Ian Urbina in June featuring leaked internal emails that highlighted doubts among federal regulators and oil/gas industry officials, and that questioned the economics of extracting shale gas from wells. Urbina quoted an unnamed analyst comparing the bonanza over shale gas to "giant Ponzi schemes."

The oil and gas industry's response was to throw every sort of allegation imaginable at the *Times* reporters. Name-calling, character assassination, charges of ideologically based reporting and worse have been hurled.

Wading through the charges and allegations against Urbina and his colleagues, it's easy to start to believe that what's up is down, in a sense. This is masterful spin: generate enough fog, convince people it's smoke, and eventually they'll believe that it is fire.

I'm not here to render a verdict on the coverage but to focus on the now-ritual outrage machine that gears up following every significant investigative series regardless of topic or findings.

The industry's reaction to the series fell into three categorical themes, repeated again and again. First, critics contend that the series is thinly researched. This is a fascinating argument given the massive piles of annotated primary source documents supporting the major tenets of the stories.

Second, its critics contend that the *Times* had its facts wrong. But dislike of facts does not equal factual error.

Finally, and perhaps most creatively, critics have assailed the newspaper for redacting some of the documents it published. Oh, sure, documents were redacted – but only to protect leakers, and only then after federal agencies refused to turn them over through FOI requests.

Howl loud enough, long enough, though, and you can gin up sufficient controversy that someone on high will feel the need to respond to said critics, thus lending them an aura of legitimacy they so richly do not deserve.

That's a shame, because any legitimate controversies created by the series should form the basis of discussion and debate. Instead, factual controversies tend to be drowned out by wave after wave of distractions such as the age-old cry of bias.

In this instance, the *Times* ombudsman, Arthur Brisbane, a fine newspaper editor with a rich pedigree in the news business, really had little choice but to wade into the fray after sufficient "controversy" had been generated.

Brisbane penned a pair of columns, the first a critique of the framing of one of the stories, the second criticizing the use of anonymous sources in the series. This was pretty typical ombuds stuff, agree with it or not, and it's pretty easy to assail anonymity, at least until one realizes that this series is a sterling example of a case when anonymity is defensible – when a compelling story of national import is not going to be told otherwise.

The rest of the *Times* news staff must have felt that way, because for the first time since they initiated the public editor position, the newsroom responded to the ombuds's column – twice.

This whole episode is illustrative of the very real challenges facing investigative journalism today. Confronted by deep-pocketed industry spin machines with nothing but time and money on their hands, every story that investigates aggregated corporate power can count on similar attacks.

It's nothing new, but it's more regimented, more visceral and more time-consuming than ever before. Journalists must respond to such attacks with a restatement of facts, with new explanations of previous stories, in interviews with journalists covering the "controversy." It siphons precious resources away from the enterprise, every day.

Charles N. Davis is an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism. He is co-author, with David Cuillier, of "The Art of Access."

I'm not here to render a verdict on the coverage but to focus on the now-ritual outrage machine that gears up following every significant investigative series...

New and expanded blogs on IRE's website provide tips, success stories and reporting resources. Here are excerpts from a few recent blog posts in case you missed them or haven't explored the new online offerings.

Snapshots from our blogs

From: "Doctor data, closed by federal government, available through journalism groups' efforts"

As part of an effort by three journalism organizations to maintain public access to an important database of physician discipline records, that data has been made available free of charge through the IRE website.

Investigative Reporters and Editors, the Association of Health Care Journalists, the Society of Professional Journalists and a growing list of other organizations have protested the government's decision to cut off access to The National Practitioner Data Bank, which has been used by reporters for many years to investigate issues involving lax oversight of physicians. The version of the data that has traditionally been publicly available does not identify doctors, but contains other important information that allows journalists and others to look for trends in disciplinary actions. The data has been part of IRE's Database Library, which obtains federal government data and makes it easier for journalists to use.

A recently updated version of the data is being offered free of charge from IRE's website. The entire data set, current as of August, is available for download, as are individual breakouts of the data by state in Excel files that are ready for fast analysis. IRE also has filed a Freedom of Information request for the most up-to-date version of the database and is awaiting a response.

The public use file is being reviewed and changes may be made to further assure confidentiality before public access is restored, an official told *The New York Times*.

Opensecrets.org tracks lobbying efforts and contributions to candidates for federal office.

From: "Piercing the secrecy of private companies"

Investigating private companies can stymie even the most dogged reporter. They aren't subject to Sunshine requests and they don't file paperwork with the Securities and Exchange Commission. But chances are, you can still find out a lot about most of them.

Ames Alexander, a reporter for *The Charlotte Observer*, detailed some of these strategies at a recent training seminar in Charlotte, N.C. Here are a few of the insights that Alexander shared:

"For information about a company's occupational safety history, visit OSHA's data and statistics page. From there, you can search the agency's database for all inspections conducted at a particular company. You'll find basic information about each OSHA inspection, including violations found and fines issued. But for the detailed information about what inspectors found, you need to file a Freedom of Information request with the regional OSHA office that oversees the inspectors." (The NICAR Database Library also has the complete OSHA database for reporters who want to look at trends.)

"For information about environmental violations, visit EPA's Echo site (Enforcement and Compliance History Online). The Toxics Release Inventory provides a lot of information about toxic chemicals discharged by a particular company."

"Elections boards: Has the CEO of the Acme Company given campaign money to lawmakers who do the company's bidding? Start your research at www.followthemoney.org or the state elections board website and search for contributions to state candidates. For contributions to federal candidates, go to www.opensecrets.org. At that site, you can also search for information about a company's lobbying efforts. You can also visit the Federal Election Commission's website, which has several searchable databases." (The NICAR Database Library scrapes the complete FEC campaign contributions database and has it available to members.)

"For advance information about major layoffs, take advantage of the WARN Act. That requires employers to give notice before they close plants or lay off large numbers of employees. These notices generally are filed with state departments of labor or commerce. But be aware that companies often find ways to avoid filing these notices."

For many more details and tips, check out Alexander's Tipsheet from the workshop, as well as other IRE Tipsheets that touch on investigating corporations.

From: Breaking news: Resources to cover earthquakes, other natural disasters

IRE collected resources for journalists who covered the Aug. 23 earthquake, which affected large portions of the Eastern Seaboard. The recommendations can help others when future disasters occur.

One story suggestion: request your community's emergency/disaster plans. After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, many areas beefed up their disaster response plans. Were those procedures followed?

IRE tipsheets (must be a member to access)
Investigating Unlikely Disasters: Post-Disaster Approaches – Many natural disasters happen so rarely that we forget what to do when one strikes. Jeff Donn, Associated Press, gives great tips on what and how to investigate the post-disaster story.

Measuring risk: From earthquakes to nuclear plants, how to investigate community preparedness – Get tips on how to investigate community preparedness. Corey Johnson offers lessons learned from "On Shaky Ground," a 19-month investigation of the seismic safety of California's schools.

Be Prepared, Before the Storm Hits – Start planning before the storm hits. Stephen Stock, WFOR-TV (Miami), and Augstin Armendariz, California Watch, provide this useful PowerPoint on what to do before it's too late.

Investigating After Weather Disaster – Jeremy Finley, WSMV-TV (Nashville, Tenn.), winner in IRE's 2011 Breaking News Investigation category, describes in detail what to do before, during and after the weather strikes.

Covering Natural Disasters – Covering natural disasters can be an overwhelming task, use these tips from Robert McClure, Chief Environmental Correspondent at InvestigateWest. He provides advice for before the weather starts.

Working the edges – This tipsheet by Nicole Vap, KUSA-TV (Denver), addresses being ready to cover disasters – beginning with a "spot-news" checklist and recommendations for handling coverage once a disaster happens.

Data Library Data Sets – SBA disaster loans
The Small Business Administration is a big player in assisting the owners of homes and businesses after a declared disaster. The data include loans since 1980 and are current through September 2010. It includes information on loans given in connection to prior earthquakes, including the 1994 Northridge and the 1989 San Francisco quakes. The database includes such information as the individual or company name, mailing address, a code for the type of disaster that occurred, date the disaster loan was approved for an SBA guarantee, amount of the loan, and for businesses, whether the loan was paid or charged off (went bad). The main table contains more than 750,000 records.

IRE SERVICES

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS, INC. is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting within the field of journalism. IRE was formed in 1975 with the intent of creating a networking tool and a forum in which journalists from across the country could raise questions and exchange ideas. IRE provides educational services to reporters, editors and others interested in investigative reporting and works to maintain high professional standards.

Programs and Services:

IRE RESOURCE CENTER – A rich reserve of print and broadcast stories, tipsheets and guides to help you start and complete the best work of your career. This unique library is the starting point of any piece you're working on. You can search through abstracts of more than 20,000 investigative-reporting stories through our website.
Contact: Lauren Grandestaff, lauren@ire.org, 573-882-3364

IRE AND NICAR DATABASE LIBRARY – Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. The library has copies of many government databases, and makes them available to news organizations at or below actual cost. Analysis services are available on these databases, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.
Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281. To order data, call 573-884-7711

ON-THE-ROAD TRAINING – As a top promoter of journalism education, IRE offers loads of training opportunities throughout the year. Possibilities range from national conferences and regional workshops to weeklong boot camps and on-site newsroom training. Costs are on a sliding scale and fellowships are available to many of the events.
Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281.

Publications:

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published four times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. The Journal also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.
Contact: Mark Horvit, mhorvit@ire.org, 573-882-1984

UPLINK – Electronic newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. Uplink stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.
Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

REPORTER.ORG – A collection of Web-based resources for journalists, journalism educators and others. Discounted Web hosting and services such as mailing list management and site development are provided to other nonprofit journalism organizations.
Contact: Mark Horvit, mhorvit@ire.org, 573-882-1984

For information on:

ADVERTISING – IRE staff, 573-882-2042
CONFERENCES AND BOOT CAMPS – Stephanie Sinn, stephanie@ire.org, 573-882-8969
DONATIONS – Alan Lynes, alan@ire.org, 573-884-2222
LISTSERVS – Amy Johnston, amy@ire.org, 573-884-1444
MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – John Green, jgreen@ire.org, 573-882-2772

Mailing Address:

IRE, 141 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211

UPLINK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

in our overall count, but our story noted that our Pinnacle estimate likely grossly underestimated the number of problem implants.

Once I was happy with the filters, then it was time to count. This is when it is essential to understand one of the most important caveats about MAUDE: It is rife with duplicate reporting.

Each record in Maude represents one report. Multiple reports can be – and often are – filed for the same faulty device in the same patient. Sometimes, a doctor, a hospital, the patient and the device manufacturer all file reports about the same incident. Sometimes, reports are generated for different components in the same device. One faulty hip, for example, could result in one report for the ball component and a completely separate report for the cup.

The FDA accounts for this by using two different ID numbers. One, the MDRREPORT field, is an ID assigned to each individual report and is used in joining the various MAUDE tables. Because of duplicate reporting, there can be multiple MDRREPORT numbers for each incident.

The other ID, the EVENT field in the main MDR table, is unique to each incident. If a doctor, a hospital and a patient all report the same faulty device, those reports all should have the same EVENT number in MAUDE. (Emphasis on *should*. It is quite possible, and I would wager likely, that the FDA does not catch all of the duplicate reporting. And so much information is redacted in the interest of patient privacy that you can't really test for this.)

To produce accurate counts of the number of faulty devices reported to the FDA, you need to count distinct instances of the EVENT ID. Here is one of my ultimate queries, which counted reports by year for the DePuy ASR hip implant:

```
SELECT YEAR(m.datereceived) as year_reported,
COUNT(DISTINCT m.event) as number_events
FROM mdr m JOIN device d
        ON m.mdrreport = d.mdrreport
WHERE d.manufacturername LIKE '%puy%'
AND (d.brandname like '%asr%' or d.genericname like '%asr%')
GROUP BY YEAR(m.datereceived)
ORDER BY YEAR(m.datereceived)
```

Lastly, avoid false precision in reporting your results. At the end of the day, because of the messiness of this data, you end up with an estimate of the number of reports filed with the FDA. And because reports are voluntary, you do not have the complete universe of faulty devices. In our story, the key sentence stated that the FDA had received "more than 5,000 reports since January" about faulty all-metal hip implants.

MAUDE is available for purchase from the NICAR database library, which has the data through 2006. (http://data.nicar.org/node/22) More recent data is available for download from the FDA, (www.fda.gov/MedicalDevices/DeviceRegulationandGuidance/PostmarketRequirements/ReportingAdverseEvents/ucm127891.htm), which updates the database quarterly. Note that the data structure changed in the mid-1990s. If you want to look at device history from 1996 and earlier, you'll need two different datasets.

OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM

IRE AWARDS 2011

FOR OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN: CHECK ONE CATEGORY ONLY

PRINT/ONLINE (written word)
_____ Large
_____ Medium
_____ Small

BROADCAST/VIDEO
_____Large
_____Medium
_____Small

MULTIPLATFORM
_____Large
_____Medium
_____Small

_____RADIO/AUDIO (one category, any size)

_____BOOK

Market size if applicable:_____

Highest single day circ if applicable:_____

SPECIAL CATEGORIES:

_____Tom Renner Award (any medium, any size)
_____IRE FOI Award (any medium, any size)
_____Student Work (any medium, any size)
_____ Breaking News Investigations (any medium, any size)

GANNETT AWARD FOR INNOVATION IN WATCHDOG JOURNALISM _____

(CHECK ENTRY FEE)

MEMBER (membership #_____)
_____$55 entry fee (Current IRE Member)
_____Free entry (Current Student Member)

Name of member involved in entered work:

_____

NONMEMBER
_____$125 entry fee (includes one-year IRE membership)
_____$25 entry fee (includes one-year IRE student membership)

Payment must accompany entry.

If checking nonmember entry, designate the reporter who will receive the one-year membership. Provide all contact information (please type or print clearly):

Name: _____

News organization:_____

Mailing address:_____

_____

_____

_____

Phone number: _____

Fax number: _____

Email:_____

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

By entering this contest, you and your news organization grant IRE permission to use the entry, including the information on this form and the questionnaire, for educational purposes. Such uses may include: 1) print, video or online resources, 2) IRE compilations, feeds or award tapes and 3) streaming video from IRE's website. The **authorized signature** of at least one entrant or the contest coordinator, by and/or on behalf of the respective news organization, is **required** for contest entry.

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

To be completed by person submitting the entry. (Please type or print clearly.)

Contact person: _____ News organization: _____

Mailing address: _____

Phone number: _____ Fax number: _____ Email: _____

Title of Entry: _____ Length (time) of audio or video entry_____

Reporters involved in effort: List significant contributors in the order they should appear on IRE Awards. If this entry is named a winner, only those people listed will be entered into our official records. Check the box next to the contributor if he or she is a current IRE member. Attach additional sheet if necessary.

	Name	Title	Member
1.	_____	_____	☐
2.	_____	_____	☐
3.	_____	_____	☐
4.	_____	_____	☐
5.	_____	_____	☐

Payment may be made by personal or company check payable to IRE, or credit card. Please complete the section below regarding your payment method.

Please do not submit entries without the required entry fees.

AmEx____ VISA____ MasterCard____ Discover____ Card Number: _____ **Check:** ____

Exp. Date _____ **Authorized Signature** _____ **Security Number:**_____ **Check Number:**_____

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
Missouri School of Journalism
141 Neff Annex
Columbia, MO 65211
www.ire.org

CALL FOR ENTRIES

IRE AWARDS 2011

IRE® The annual contest of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.

DEADLINE: Postmark by Jan. 13, 2012

We've redesigned our entry categories to better reflect the way news is reported and presented.

For details please see www.ire.org/contest.

NEW CATEGORIES FOR 2011

In order to better accommodate the ever-changing ways you report and present the news, IRE has completely revamped the contest categories.

Instead of entering by media type, you will now enter based on the nature of the work itself. Broadcasters can enter text, newspapers can enter videos, and any organization that has a multimedia project, will enter in multiplatform. We still divide entrants into size categories (large, medium and small).

For more information on the categories and sizes, see the article on page 3 or the FAQ at ire.org/resourcecenter/contest/ireawardsfaq.