

What Is the Value in Belonging to the Oil Heat Institute?

For several years, my relatively small (4 delivery trucks) family owned oil company had received notices of the activities of the Oil Heat Institute of Rhode Island. The organization's efforts involved following state and federal policy changes, and in affecting changes that would "benefit our industry." The institute also offered classes, and advice to members on issues related to our business. Of course, we were asked to support the organization by contributing dues for membership. To be honest, we really didn't pay much attention.

During those years, we really couldn't perceive how the activities of this group actually had any bearing at all on our little company. We didn't have time for fighting the government, or forming public policy, and we "couldn't afford" the dues. We were busy watching our pennies, and finding our way in our own little market.

Two winters ago at a New England Fuel Institute meeting, an industry group's attorney was speaking about a federal mandate that had recently changed, and we found to our great surprise that we were in violation of the mandate. Penalties for noncompliance were *enormous!* Jail time was involved! We rushed home and remedied our situation in time to avoid an incident.

But we agonized that the federal and state governments can change regulations that govern our industry without notifying us! Isn't that just like the government? Then we wondered if perhaps the Oil Heat Institute had indeed notified its members of this change? Everyone else seemed to know. Why hadn't we known?

So we joined the Oil Heat Institute. We rolled our eyes, and wrote the check for annual dues (If we wanted, we could spread out the payments over the year by paying monthly. How easy is that?). The cost was far, far less than the penalties, court, and attorney costs we would have faced (alone, with an attorney who's expertise is not in the petroleum industry) if we had been in noncompliance of a single regulation.

At first, we just read the notices. But soon there were issues that seemed to require more of our attention. Then some issue caused me to attend a

meeting. Members were friendly. I voiced my concerns and ideas, and the group was receptive. *We* found a workable plan that made sense. After a few months of participation, there were perhaps 6 or 7 times when I felt that the work accomplished by the Oil Heat Institute *that day* was worth my company's *annual dues!*

Now the news of regulatory changes (or victory in *preventing* regulatory changes), news of classes being held locally (that keep my employees better informed and better qualified than my competitors'), opportunities to speak with Legislators who form public policy, and so much more, comes right to my desktop! A new website carries news of our good deeds to the public. It gives the OHI a public face, and shows my customers that through membership, my company is up to date on issues of safety, consumer protection, pollution control, insurance, and technical training. Through membership, I understand better the issues that we all share in the oilheat business. I'm forming good business relationships with other oilheat owners. Members are positioned to accomplish mutual goals so that we survive together in challenging business climates such as the one we find ourselves in today.

So if you are wondering if there is any advantage to belonging to the Oil Heat Institute, I would have to say *there is every advantage* . The dues are not the challenge. The challenge is: How you will use your talents? Will you combine those talents with mine, and with the talents of the other members of the Oil Heat Institute? Will you help us to build a strong organization in our small state, for more meaningful legislation, a better business climate, and better customer relations? We're ready to welcome you! Come join us at the Oil Heat Institute!

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