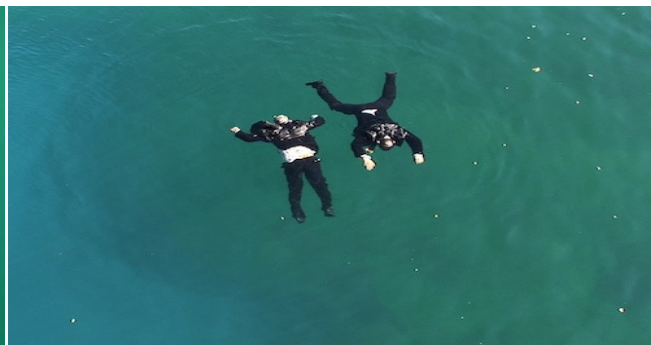


The Yes Men Fix the World



Sundance 2009:

*The Yes Men are back, but no one saw them coming. After their first film, you would think they had blown their cover, but, to the contrary, they have only stepped up their game. If you don't know them, they're Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, a pair of notorious troublemakers who sneak into corporate events disguised as captains of industry. Then they use their momentary authority to expose the biggest criminals on the planet. In *The Yes Men Fix the World*, they've set their sights on a plethora of manmade disasters, from profiteering after Hurricane Katrina to the environmental disaster in Bhopal. Initially their antics come across like adolescent pranks, but after further exploration, you discover that Bichlbaum and Bonanno can actually be considered "inside out activists." By changing reality—even temporarily—they open your mind to the possible. Sweet dreams for some, a nightmare for corporate Goliaths with skeletons in the closet. When they present what should have been done, you become acutely aware of how easy it would have been to solve the problem in the first place. A film complete with comedic interludes and, yes, an underwater ballet, *The Yes Men Fix the World* is as entertaining as it is effective. You really need to see this movie, because hilariously funny and straight to the point of the truth the way it is!*





Oops: Impostor scams Louisiana officials

KENNER, Louisiana (CNN) -- A man who pulled a hoax on Louisiana officials and 1,000 contractors by presenting himself as a federal housing official said Monday he intended to focus attention on a lack of affordable housing.

"We basically go around impersonating bad institutes or institutes doing very bad things," said the man, who identified himself as Andy Bichlbaum, a 42-year-old former college teacher of video and media arts who lives in New York and Paris.

"That would be HUD. At this moment, they're doing some really bad things."

Masquerading as Rene Oswin, an official at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Bichlbaum followed Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin to the lectern Monday morning at the Pontchartrain Center in Kenner.

In a speech to attendees of the Gulf Coast Reconstruction and Hurricane Preparedness Summit, he laid out grandiose plans for HUD to reverse course.

After the speaker read from a text he said had been prepared by his boss, HUD Secretary Alphonso Jackson, a HUD spokeswoman said the department knew nothing about the man.

"Everything is going to change about the way we work, and the change is going to start here today in New Orleans," the man said during his speech.

Jackson, he said, had had to cancel his appearance at the meeting of 1,000 builders and contractors at the Pontchartrain Center in Kenner because he had to stay in Washington to meet with President Bush.

William Loiry, president of meeting sponsor Equity International, said he was duped.

"We were contacted about a week ago or so by someone who we believed to be [public relations firm] Hill & Knowlton [saying] that they were representing the HUD secretary and that he wanted to make a major announcement at this summit."

Loiry said he was told a few minutes before he had planned to introduce Jackson that the secretary would be replaced by Oswin.

"We've done 75 national conferences, 25,000 people participated, and we certainly never encountered anything like this before," he said.

The man left a flier bearing a HUD emblem that said attendees could go to a ribbon-cutting ceremony at a public housing project. A free lunch and transportation aboard buses were promised.

"They never materialized," Loiry said.

Loiry was not impressed with the stunt. "There are many people still in need," he said in a written statement. "To perpetuate a hoax on them is cruel and disgusting."

Impostor: 'We have failed'

In his speech, Bichlbaum said the department's mission was to ensure affordable housing is available for those who need it.

"This year, in New Orleans, I'm ashamed to say we have failed," he said.

To change that, HUD would reverse its plans to demolish 5,000 units "of perfectly good public housing," with housing in the city in tight supply, he said.

Former occupants have been "begging to move back in," he said. "We're going to help them to do that."

The government's practice had been to tear down public housing where it could, because such projects were thought to cause crime and unemployment, he said.

But crime rates in the city are at a record high and there is no evidence that people in the projects are more likely to be unemployed, he said.

The man added that it also would be essential to create conditions for prosperity.

Toward that end, he said, Wal-Mart would withdraw its stores from near low-income housing and "help nurture local businesses to replace them."

Wal-Mart was unmoved. "As evidenced by the fact that we recently reopened two stores in the New Orleans metropolitan area, there is absolutely no truth to these statements," said spokeswoman Marisa Bluestone.

In a comment that elicited applause from the contractors and builders, Bichlbaum said, "With your help, the prospects of New Orleanians will no longer depend on their birthplace, and the cycle of poverty will come to an end."

Finally, to ensure another hurricane does not inundate the city, Exxon and Shell have promised to spend \$8.6 billion "to finance wetlands rebuilding from \$60 billion in profits this year," he said.

HUD: 'Who the heck is that?'

Late Monday afternoon, in a telephone call with CNN, Bichlbaum said the gist of his comments about housing was truthful, even if he had to use subterfuge to deliver it.

"The only not-true part is, unfortunately, the part about them changing their minds. They are still going to tear down 5,000 units of affordable housing," he said.

The New Orleans projects are sturdily constructed brick buildings that, nevertheless, are slated for demolition, he said.

"Basically, the real reason, of course, is they want to develop New Orleans into something pleasing to tourists -- even more pleasing."

Bichlbaum said Monday's prank was the latest in a series pulled off by The Yes Men, whose members have recently masqueraded as representatives of McDonald's, Halliburton and Dow Chemical.

"Fortunately, the law protects freedom of speech," he said. "What we're doing is not actually lying. It's actually exposing the lies. There's nothing morally wrong with what we're doing."

Bichlbaum said the Yes Men plan to release a movie about their exploits next year, but that commercial gain is not their goal.

"The real reason we do it is what we're doing right now," he told a reporter. "You're paying attention to this issue of affordable housing and the absurd policies of HUD."

In Washington, HUD spokeswoman Donna White called the hoax "sick."

"This announcement is totally false; it's totally bogus," said Donna White in Washington.

No one named Rene Oswin works for the department, she said. "I'm like, who the heck is that?"

Jackson, White said, had never planned to address the meeting. "I don't even want to refer to it as a joke," White said. "At this point, it's not funny."

Annie Chen, media coordinator for Survivors Village, a tent-city protest for the reopening of public housing in New Orleans, applauded Bichlbaum's theatrics.

"Right now, a lie is better than the truth," she said.

To my point within collaboration of my pertinent nasty essays!

Don L. Johnson