

Superfund Today

A Series of Fact Sheets Highlighting the Superfund Program of Today and Tomorrow



United States
Environmental
Protection Agency

Office of Emergency
and Remedial
Response

Outreach and Special
Projects Staff

Periodic Report
Fall 1995

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Communication Facilitates Relocation at the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. Site

EPA's Community Involvement Pilot

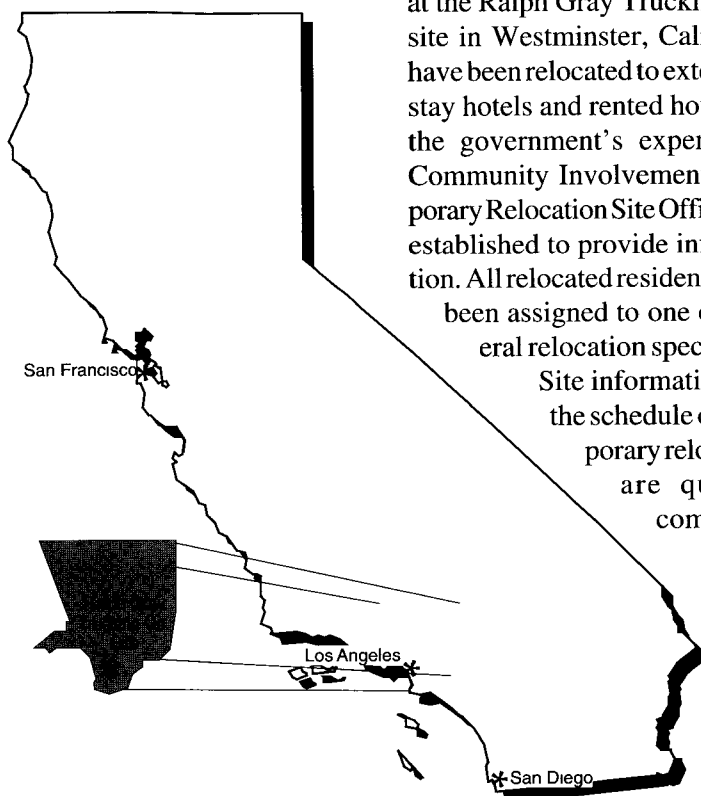
When contamination poses an immediate threat to the health and safety of residents at or near a hazardous waste site, the EPA arranges for the relocation of affected residents. Relocation is usually temporary, but permanent relocation has sometimes been necessary. To protect residents from severe hazards and threats,



EPA has relocated over 10,000 people from sites throughout all 10 regions since 1980.

While EPA excavates waste found buried in backyards, approximately 50 families living at the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. site in Westminster, California have been relocated to extended-stay hotels and rented houses at the government's expense. A Community Involvement/Temporary Relocation Site Office was established to provide information. All relocated residents have been assigned to one of several relocation specialists.

Site information and the schedule of temporary relocation are quickly communi-



In This Issue...

EPA officials at the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. site promoted earlier public involvement in clean-up decisions and created innovative communication tools to communicate with the surrounding community.

In Future Issues...

Perspectives on environmental justice, resources for the community, and site-related risk.

cated through one-on-one meetings with EPA staff, community meetings, newsletters, guidance pamphlets, fact sheets, toll-free information numbers, and extensive press releases, as well as constant interaction with EPA relocation specialists.

Early and ongoing communication with the affected families has made the relocation process proceed smoothly and quickly. Residents were successfully relocated starting in August 1994 and will return to their homes once EPA has determined the hazardous waste threat has been removed. ☐

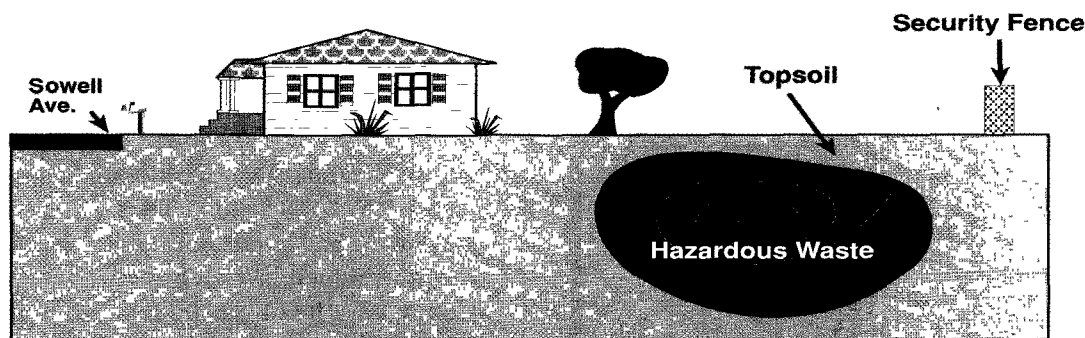
Residents Find a Mess in Their Backyard

To the residents in Westminster, California, the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. hazardous waste site is literally a mess in their backyards. In the early 1930's, the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. dumped petroleum waste products into four open pits on land owned by his company. In 1936, Mr. Gray was convicted of maintaining a public nuisance after numerous complaints were filed with local health officials and the Westminster Chamber of Commerce. He was fined \$100 and ordered to "abate the nuisance" within 30 days. The wastes were never removed although the county health inspector continued to receive complaints.

In 1958, a housing developer decided to build homes at this location. He dug two trenches in the shape of a "T" and reburied the wastes from the original, uncovered pits. He then built homes with their backyards on top of the trenches. Almost immediately, black sludge, began seeping up through the yards, pools, decks, room additions, and patios of these residents. The waste and soil contain benzene, polyaromatic hydrocarbons, and sulfur compounds. These toxic wastes are suspected of being the cause of headaches, nausea, and respiratory problems occurring among the residents.

Ralph Gray has since died, his company no longer exists, and no descendants can be found. The developer is deceased with no succes-

sors. In 1992, the site was added to the National Priorities List (NPL), EPA's roster of the nation's most serious, uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites that are eligible for cleanup under the Superfund program. The cleanup is taking place in two phases addressing each trench separately. It has required the temporary relocation of approximately 50 families, and will cost \$20 million to complete. Buried wastes and contaminated soil have been excavated and disposed of in an EPA-approved hazardous waste disposal site. Once all traces of the contamination have been removed, resident's backyards will be restored to their original state. □



Hazardous waste buried in the backyards of citizens at the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. site.

The site
60 years
ago...

WESTMINSTER HERALD

August 20, 1936

RESIDENTS COMPLAIN ABOUT GAS ODOR

Petitions are being circulated, which when filled in, will be presented to the County Board of Supervisors for attention.

The petition asks the Supervisors to take some necessary steps to have removed from this vicinity the open oil pools and/or the attending fumes and gas which are damaging crops and foods, and causing illness and disease to those who must breathe them.

Federal and State Agencies Involved in Cleanup of the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. Site

EPA - U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: Became the lead agency for the site in January 1992 at the request of the California Department of Toxic Substances Control.

ATSDR - Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry: Completed a Public Health Assessment in 1992 and determined that the site was a public health hazard.

DTSC - (California) Department of Toxic Substances Control: Conducted a Public Health Assessment under an agreement with ATSDR and identified contaminants of concern.

USBR - U.S. Bureau of Reclamation: Assisting EPA with environmental sampling, engineering studies, temporary relocation services, and construction management.

Specially-Tailored Communication Tools Ease the Burden of Relocation

Relocating residents of a community during a Superfund cleanup is a formidable task for both the affected families and EPA staff. To help with the process, EPA officials at the Ralph Gray Trucking Co. site used numerous communication tools specially designed to both obtain information about the community and to help the community understand the process.

One of the results of the questionnaire was the discovery that several of the affected families were not English-speaking. EPA saw the need to communicate to the community in their own languages and established toll-free message lines in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish. EPA also provided Vietnamese language coordinators on the project team and produced fact sheets in both English and Vietnamese.

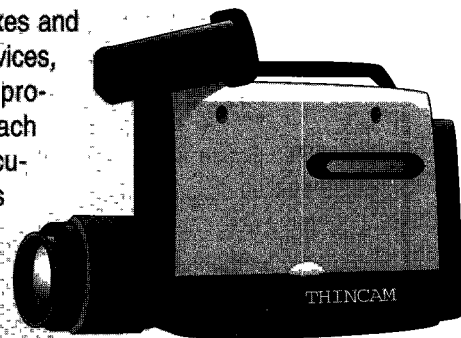
A Resident's Guide to Temporary Relocation written by EPA and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation was published in July 1994. This 27-page booklet, published in English and Vietnamese, updates residents on relocation activities as discussed in the January fact sheet, and also details the relocation schedule, accommodations, and preparations for relocation, including moving and storage,

Video Taping and Other Security Measures

The security of the houses and items left behind is of utmost importance to both residents and EPA. To guard this security, EPA recommends that valuable or irreplaceable possessions such as jewelry, electronic equipment,

and silver are not left behind. In addition, EPA has made videos of the current condition of residents' homes, including personal possessions remaining in the houses. EPA staff assist residents in inventorying items that will remain in their homes. A copy of the videotape is given to each homeowner and EPA keeps the original. Other security measures, including motion detectors,

lock-out boxes and security devices, are being provided at each house. Security guards are on duty 24-hours-a-day for the entire community. □



To gain insight into the needs of the community during the relocation process, EPA conducted interviews with citizens using an extensive questionnaire. Interviewees responded to inquiries regarding a variety of topics such as work shift, direct contact with waste, respiratory problems, physical disabilities, rental properties, pets, schools, occupations, community meetings, and media coverage. Data collected from the Ralph Gray Community Interview Questionnaire allowed community relations staff and relocation specialists to meet the specific needs of families affected by the two-phased, two-year excavation process.

A six-page fact sheet entitled "Temporary Relocation Information" was published by the EPA in January 1994 in both English and Vietnamese. The fact sheet described activities taking place at the site which necessitated the relocation process, announced a community meeting, and invited residents to preview temporary housing accommodations. It also explained who would be temporarily relocated, provided a site map, described the temporary accommodations, and discussed site security and insurance. In addition, it answered general questions residents might have about the relocation.

expenses covered, security, mail, pets, and many other issues.

Also in July, a ground-breaking ceremony occurred at which participants met with the contractor cleaning up the site, and were updated on the relocation, project and restoration schedules. Facts sheets have been published announcing each major stage of the Superfund process, including proposal to the NPL, finalization on the NPL, and the 30-day comment period on cleanup alternatives. In addition, newsletters are published periodically, updating residents on all site activities, with an emphasis on relocation information. □

Next Steps

After the last family has returned to its home and restoration is complete, the EPA will continue to monitor soil vapor for approximately five years. Groundwater is being investigated for contamination; however, drinking water is not affected by the contamination. Studies are expected to be completed in 1995 and a final cleanup remedy should be selected in 1996.

Even once the excavation of the buried wastes is complete, and while long-term investigations are underway, residents will continue to have access to EPA Community Involvement staff for as long as they may be needed. □

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON...

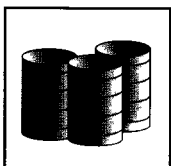
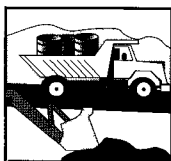
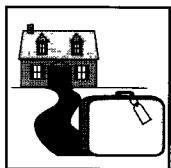
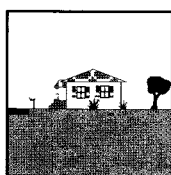
THE SITE: Fraser Felter, Community Relations Coordinator, Region 9 - (415) 744-2181

THE SUPERFUND PROGRAM: The EPA Superfund Hotline, (800) 412-9810

TO REPORT A HAZARDOUS WASTE EMERGENCY...

Call the National Response Center at (800) 424-8802

Ralph Gray Trucking Co. Site Timeline



- Fall 1995 Cleanup expected to be complete and all residents returned to their homes
- Spring 1995 2nd phase of excavation and relocation
- August 1994 1st phase of excavation and relocation
- July 1994 1st periodic community newsletter issued
- July 1994 Groundbreaking ceremony
- October 1993 Final decision on cleanup action
- September 1993 Community meeting on EPA's proposed action
- August 1993 30-day comment period on cleanup alternative begins
- June 1993 Community survey conducted
- October 1992 Finalized on NPL
- March 1992 Buried wastes should be removed
- July 1991 Cleanup plan for NPL
- Early 1991 Initial community relations
- 1987 Initial site investigation
- December 1986 Initial site investigation; operations
- Co. dumped products



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