



Guide To Community Involvement for Site Assessment Managers

Office of Emergency and Remedial Response
Hazardous Site Evaluation Division 5204G

Quick Reference Fact Sheet

Communicating Superfund Activities to the Public

As an EPA employee or a contractor who supports site assessment activities, you have the opportunity to help EPA foster open communication and build trust within the communities it serves. Because you are the first—and sometimes, the only—EPA representative most of the public encounters at a hazardous waste site, your actions have an enormous impact on community awareness of and attitudes toward the Superfund program. EPA cannot afford to wait to share information with the community until a site is eligible for the National Priorities List (NPL) or needs a removal action. The program's staff and contractors need to set the stage for two-way communication with the public from the start.

Although interaction with the community is primarily an EPA function, site assessment contractors also need to be prepared to assist by answering technical questions from the public while on site and relaying any public concerns to EPA. Contractors also need to know to refer the public to EPA staff members for further information.

This fact sheet will help you to ensure that the first experience the community has with EPA at a hazardous waste site is a positive one. In addition to providing information on what community involvement initiatives you can take during the technical phases of the site assessment, it

provides instructions on how to take these actions. Inside, you will find ideas, examples, guidance tips, and detailed references to help you face this challenge.

Community involvement during the site assessment is not required by the Superfund law or the National Contingency Plan. However, it would be shortsighted not to take advantage of this opportunity to educate and inform the public about the Superfund program and the site assessment work you are performing. Reaching out to people early on can help build trust in EPA and its work, and alleviate community fears.

Certain types of sites may require early community involvement because they are likely to be the focus of strong public interest:

- Sites that are likely to be added to the NPL or where removal actions are expected to be initiated;
- Sites located near other NPL or removal sites in which the public is interested;
- Sites located in densely populated areas;
- Sites for which public inquiries have been received (letters and phone calls) at the State and local levels; and
- Sites at which a person or community group requested the preliminary assessment (PA) report.

Focus your community outreach efforts on the sites that you think will have high levels of public interest.

INSIDE:

A GUIDE FOR EPA EMPLOYEES AND SITE ASSESSMENT CONTRACTORS



Site Discovery

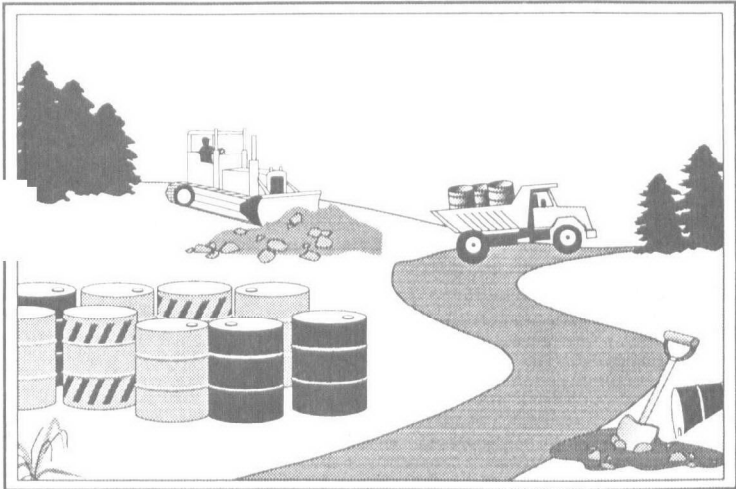
Preliminary
Assessment

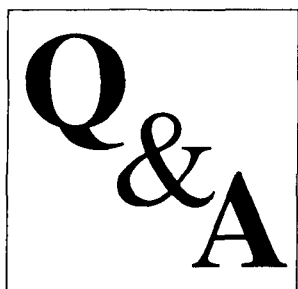
Site Inspection

Hazard
Ranking System

National
Priorities List

<div data-bbox="227 184 674 361"> </div> <div data-bbox="338 331 740 730"> <p>SITE DISCOVERY</p> <p>Brief contractors who support site assessment activities on their roles and responsibilities in assisting EPA with community relations at a site.</p> </div>	<div data-bbox="842 184 1483 226"> <p>During the Preliminary Assessment</p> </div> <div data-bbox="779 268 1539 718"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess likelihood of risk. • Share and exchange information with your community relations (CR) staff on the site background. • If needed, prepare written materials, such as the generic "PA Superfund Site Update" fact sheet (see "For Further Information" on this page), tailored to the specific site conditions. Send copies of the fact sheet to interested parties. • Make copies of the final PA report available to the public upon request. • For further information call the Site Assessment Branch in the Office of Emergency and Remedial Response (OERR), Hazardous Site Evaluation Division (HSED), EPA Headquarters, 703-603-8860. </div> <div data-bbox="1483 667 1556 739"> </div>
<div data-bbox="256 766 680 808"> <p>For Further Information</p> </div> <div data-bbox="165 856 756 1318"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For copies of generic fact sheets on the various site assessment phases, contact the Site Assessment Branch in the OERR/HSED at EPA Headquarters, 703-603-8860. • HSED also has developed a companion fact sheet to this document, <i>Site Assessment: Evaluating Risks at Superfund Sites</i> (OSWER Directive 9345.4-03FS). • For sample press releases, guidelines on establishing an information repository, and guidelines for holding public meetings and availability sessions, see Appendix A of <i>Community Relations in Superfund: A Handbook</i> (EPA/540/R-92/009, January 1992). </div>	<div data-bbox="826 940 1556 1201"> <p>Guide to Community Involvement for Site Assessment Managers</p> </div>
<div data-bbox="227 1444 564 1801"> <p>TRANSITION SITE TO REMEDIAL STAFF</p> </div> <div data-bbox="300 1528 713 1948"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief the RPM on the technical and CR issues related to the site. • Refer any further community inquiries about the site to the CR staff. </div> <div data-bbox="685 1432 746 1507"> </div>	<div data-bbox="784 1423 1556 1747"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If necessary, prepare a fact sheet about the site. You can prepare a handout or modify the generic fact sheet (see "For Further Information" on this page). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Define the site and provide a map; – Scope out the Superfund process and the general timeframe for remediation; – Provide the name of the assigned CR staff member and the remedial project manager (RPM); and – Distribute copies of the fact sheet to high-visibility spots and the information repository. </div> <div data-bbox="971 1921 1384 1969"> <p>Inclusion on Final NPL</p> </div>

<p>In the Event of a Site Evaluation Accomplished Finding</p> <p>11, at any point during the site assessment, EPA determines that no further action is necessary at the site, communicate this status.</p> <p>Prepare a press release on your findings and send it to the local media and to people who requested specific information. Obtain addresses and phone numbers of the local media from the regional office of public affairs or the town's local phone book. Follow up the mailing with a brief phone call. Sample press releases can be found in the CR Handbook.</p>	<p>In the Event of a Removal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brief the onscene coordinator (OSC) and designated CR coordinator on your assessment of community interest.• Refer any further inquiries about the site to the CR staff.	<p>ENFORCEMENT</p> <div><p>Share technical and community insights with enforcement staff to ensure that the search for potentially responsible parties is initiated early.</p></div> <p>FIRST</p> <p>↓</p>
	<p>During the Site Inspection (SI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you assess a high level of community interest, notify a member of the CR staff that an SI is in progress and discuss a communication strategy. Keep the community "in the loop":<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Hold an informal public meeting on the project status/schedule;– Make copies of the SI report available to the public upon request;– Call city, county, and State officials. Their numbers are in the local phone book;– Tailor the generic fact sheet (see "For Further Information" on page 2) to preliminary findings and next steps at your site;– Send the fact sheet to the mayor, local businesses, and schools; and– Establish an information repository at a local library. <p>These outreach activities have been successful at many sites.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community interest is likely to heighten here. Interested parties should be made aware of the public comment period for proposed sites.<ul style="list-style-type: none">– If warranted, compile a mailing list and send notice to interested parties.– If interest heightens, send a press release to the local media on the NPL proposal date with directions on how to comment on/review the HRS package. Remember, the community will be less antagonistic if you are forthcoming with information.– Consider holding an informal "availability session" to receive questions and discuss public concerns and issues at high-interest sites.	<div><p>PREPARE HAZARD RANKING SYSTEM (HRS) PACKAGE</p><p>Reminders</p><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not cause unnecessary panic or alarm in the community by sharing inadequate or insufficient information.• Remind public that site assessment is information-gathering, not cleanup.• Remember that "people handling" skills are as important as technical skills.</div>	
<p>National Priorities List (NPL) Proposal</p>		



Common Questions From the Public:

A Primer for EPA Staff

EPA staff members and their support contractors often need to answer tough questions from the public. Some of these questions are difficult because they are not directly related to either the site or the Superfund process (see examples on this page). Others are difficult because they require you to translate the Superfund process into plain English (see pages 5 through 7). Please remember as you answer these questions that public perception is very important.

☒ The Authority Question

Q: I've been in the construction business for years. Why can't you just clean it all up now?

A: You're asking about EPA's decision-making processes for using its resources. To ensure that EPA fully addresses all sites that present a risk to human health or the environment, we set priorities. We will first investigate whether this site poses a problem. This process allows EPA to use its limited resources most effectively.

Tips: Restate the question, explaining the purpose of the site assessment phase. Focus on the facts.

☒ The Personal Risk Question

Q: Is my baby going to be exposed to contaminated water?

A: If we find that there's an immediate threat to human health, we will initiate a removal action to reduce the risk. We will keep you informed about whether we find such an action to be necessary.

Tips: Remember that you must respond to community concerns with facts. If it's a community concern, it's a real issue that you need to address. All public concerns deserve your attention.

☒ Multiple Questions

Q: I want to know why my water isn't being tested and why you wear all that protective equipment and what you're going to do to clean it all up.

A: Let me answer your questions one at a time. First, I'll explain the purpose of our study. . . .

Tips: Split the questions into manageable pieces. Provide contact's name for further information (see page 8 of this fact sheet). When finished, move to the next question from the public.

☒ The Speculative Question

Q: What will you do if the contamination spreads to our private wells?

A: Right now, we need to see if there is any contamination. If we do find a problem, the first step will be to define where contamination is and where it might spread.

Tips: Identify speculative nature. Clarify that the site assessment phase is for information gathering. Clarify plausibility of "if." Note that EPA will take the needed steps to control any immediate threats right away.

☒ The Nonquestion

Q: I've lived here 32 years, and I don't think much of EPA, and those well locations are near my property.

A: You've mentioned your long history here, but I'm not sure I understand your question. Do you have a specific question about site conditions?

Tips: Repeat subject to acknowledge your interest. Respond if the question is clear. If not clear, then request that the person provide further details.

☒ The Concerned Public Servant Question

Q: I'm running for mayor. As the people's representative, I'd like to know what your plans are for dealing with this disaster.

A: I'm sure all of this town's residents are concerned. Let me emphasize that, right now, we're determining whether there is a problem.

Tips: Focus on facts. Treat all parties with equal respect and concern.

HOW DO I RESPOND TO COMMUNITY CONCERNS ABOUT SITES IN THE ASSESSMENT PHASE?

Superfund Process Questions

Q

What is Superfund?

A

Explain that Congress established the Superfund program to ensure that threats to human health and the environment from uncontrolled and abandoned hazardous waste sites are properly investigated and, when necessary, addressed. Explain that Superfund staff have the authority to address such sites so that nationally consistent evaluation criteria are applied and remediated sites meet EPA's standards.

Q

What happens if a site is not included on the NPL for remediation?

A

Explain that such sites may be referred to States or deferred to other authorities (for example, the RCRA program and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission).

Q

What is the State's role in all of these investigations?

A

Tell the community that the State environmental agency may perform investigations and remedial actions. Note that the State also provides EPA with background information on immediate threats to the population or environment and on any possible responsible parties. Explain that the State shares the cost of any long-term fund-lead actions. Finally, describe how the State comments on the proposal of sites to the NPL and concurs on the selected remedies and on the deletion of sites from the NPL.

Q

What stage of the process are you in now? How long will it take you to find out whether a threat exists? When will we know for certain whether we are in danger?

A

Note that a PA must be completed within 1 year of site discovery. Give the person a realistic timeframe for completing the SI

and, if necessary, the scoring and listing processes. Be sure to note the status of efforts to identify the polluters. Acknowledge any other factors that you think could delay EPA's decision about whether the site needs further action.

Q

Why can't you take all of the contaminated material away right now, just to be safe?

A

Point out that the purpose of the site assessment phase is to gather sufficient information and determine if there is any contamination that needs to be addressed. If contamination is found, EPA will take the needed steps to ensure that any immediate threats are controlled right away.

Q

How can I get more information on my health-related concerns?

A

Tell interested parties that they can get more information from the EPA regional Superfund office as well as the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). The ATSDR provides information on the health effects of hazardous substances to the public. Interested parties can get the phone number of the ATSDR office in their region from the regional EPA Superfund office.

Site-Specific Questions

Q

If the site is added to the NPL, how will we know when it's been fully addressed?

A

Explain that EPA notifies the community and requests public comments on the actions proposed to be taken at the site. In addition, EPA notifies the community when site activities are completed and when the site is expected to be deleted from the NPL. Note that the community can become involved throughout the Superfund process, such as commenting on possible listing.

Site Assessment Fact Sheet

Q Who might be responsible for the contamination? What will happen to the responsible parties?

A Explain that the region initiates efforts to determine exactly who is responsible for any problems found. EPA may require the parties to perform the site activities by (1) negotiating an agreement or (2) issuing legal orders to them. EPA oversees each step of any action they conduct, from planning to design and implementation to long-term maintenance. If, for whatever reason, the parties refuse to comply with EPA's orders, they can be held liable for up to three times the cost of the site activities. This strategy allows EPA to make the best use of its limited resources by ensuring that those responsible perform the remediation, whenever possible, and that all remediated sites meet EPA's standards.

Q What contaminants have you found at the site? What health effects are associated with exposure to them?

A Name (in plain English) the contaminants that have been found to date and explain the possible health effects and the likelihood of risk or exposure (e.g., "The likelihood of exposure that this level translates into is similar to one penny in a million dollars."). Emphasize that full-scale sampling has not yet been performed to verify whether these substances actually pose a threat to human health and the environment. Refer those with further interest to *Understanding Risk Assessment* (EPA Publication 9285.7-06). Mention the ATSDR as a resource on health-related concerns.

Q What are EPA's plans for the XYZ site, which is also in our area?

A If you know of any EPA or State action at the referenced site, provide this information. If you don't, investigate further. Also, tell residents that they can request EPA to perform a PA at any site. Provide the resident with a point of contact in your region for PA petitions.

Q There's a high rate of cancer in this neighborhood. Is it related to the site?

A Restate that it's too early to make any such conclusion at this time. Inform residents that they can request the ATSDR to perform a health assessment. Provide information on contacting the ATSDR (EPA Publication 9285.4-05FS), which distributes fact sheets on its activities.

Q Is it safe for my kids to play outdoors and drink our well water?

A Explain that if a threat exists, EPA will take appropriate actions to protect those at risk. Describe what these actions might include, such as providing an alternate water supply, taking steps to secure the site (for example, building a fence or posting warning signs), or, as a last resort, temporarily or permanently relocating those at risk. Note that EPA would take these protective measures in addition to actually addressing contamination.

Q What exactly is "the site"? How do you know where it ends? What if the site is larger than originally thought?

A Provide residents with the site map from the PA. Explain that EPA designates the area in which contamination exists as "the site." Tell how samples are taken near the area of concern and in the direction of likely migration until clean samples are found. Note that the area of contamination can be expanded at any time during the investigations if further contamination is discovered.

Q What do these sampling results from my well mean?

A Offer to hold workshops or take calls on the sampling results.

Q I live next door to the site and see EPA and contractor personnel wearing “moon suits.” Am I safe?

A Explain that if a dangerous situation arises, EPA will notify the community and will take protective actions. EPA and contractor personnel wear protective gear in case they come in contact with hazardous materials. Also, note how personnel on site regularly handle hazardous materials and are not always sure if the materials they are handling are, in fact, hazardous.

Questions about Public Involvement

Q How can we get further information? How can we get a list of the sites EPA has investigated?

A Give the public the EPA community relations contact person’s name and phone number. See page 8 for other useful phone numbers you may need.

Q How can we verify your findings? What if we disagree with your conclusions?

A Explain that they can get copies of the results of the investigations from the information repository and that they can always contact the regional office (see page 8) for further information. Remind them that they have the opportunity to comment on the proposal of any site to the NPL, the long-term actions proposed for any NPL site, and any proposed NPL deletions when remediation is complete. Describe how community groups can apply for funds from EPA to hire technical advisors (via a technical assistance grant) if the site is proposed to the NPL.

Questions about Paying for Cleanup

Q Does the cost of site activities factor into your decision to add a site to the NPL?

A No. Explain that risk is the primary factor used in making a decision to list a site on the NPL. Cost is only a factor in weighing equally protective remedies.

Q What happens if you address the site and later find more problems?

A Explain the operation and maintenance component of all remedial actions. Note that if the site were found to have any further problems, it can always be re-examined and, if necessary, addressed again. Describe EPA’s 5-year review process for ensuring the effectiveness of completed remedial actions when hazardous materials remain on the site.

Q Who will perform any needed work? Will our taxes go up to pay for the activities? Will it create local jobs?

A Explain that EPA attempts to get the responsible parties to pay for and perform site activities, with EPA supervision, by negotiating an agreement with them or issuing legal orders to them. Note that if the responsible parties are not cooperative or cannot pay for the action, the Superfund pays for the remediation and EPA tries to recover the cost later. Explain that site assessment investigations are financed from the Superfund. Point out that the sources of the Superfund are the oil and chemical industries; only a small fraction of this fund is generated by income tax dollars. Whether EPA or private parties pay for the remediation, contractors actually perform the work. This allows EPA to address more sites and draw on contractors’ specialized expertise. Private parties who perform the remediation usually take bids from local contractors, and EPA reviews the qualifications of the selected firm. Site cleanup activities usually generate 10 jobs directly related to cleanup and 15 that are indirect jobs.

Site Assessment Fact Sheet



Important Phone Numbers

Contact the appropriate office listed below if you have any questions. You can also refer people directly to the regional offices for further assistance.

U.S. EPA Headquarters Hazardous Site Evaluation Division

- ☐ Site Assessment Branch
703-603-8860

Federal Superfund Program Information

- ☐ EPA Superfund Hotline
800-424-9346

Hazardous Waste Emergencies

- ☐ National Response Center
800-424-8802

ATSDR Emergency Response Assistance

- ☐ Emergency Response Line
404-639-0615

EPA Region 1: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont

- ☐ Superfund Community
Relations Section
617-565-2713

EPA Region 2: New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands

- ☐ Superfund Community
Relations Branch
212-264-1407

EPA Region 3: Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia

- ☐ Superfund Community
Relations Branch
800-438-2474

EPA Region 4: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee

- ☐ Superfund Site Assessment
Section
404-347-5065

EPA Region 5: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

- ☐ Office of Superfund
312-353-9773

EPA Region 6: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma Texas

- ☐ Superfund Management
Branch, Information
Management Section
214-655-6718

EPA Region 7: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska

- ☐ Public Affairs Office
913-551-7003

EPA Region 8: Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, Wyoming

- ☐ Superfund Community
Involvement Branch
303-294-1124

EPA Region 9: Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, American Samoa, Guam

- ☐ Superfund Office of
Community Relations
800-231-3075

EPA Region 10: Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington

- ☐ Superfund Community
Relations
206-553-2711