



# Fact Sheets

## Overview

A fact sheet is a brief document written to help residents and other stakeholders understand actions that EPA may be taking at a nearby Superfund site and may include explanations of laws, regulations, and technical information relevant to the site. The purpose of a fact sheet is to engage with communities by providing information that addresses common questions and concerns of those affected by a Superfund site. Fact sheets are typically:

- **Site updates** to provide community residents with general site information and to keep them abreast of site activities and cleanup progress; or
- **Special purpose documents** to convey information about a specific Superfund site action, such as proposed listing on the National Priorities List (NPL), availability of a [\*proposed plan\*](#), availability of the final engineering design, or proposed deletion of a site from the NPL.

Based on discussions among Superfund focus groups, many citizens have indicated that they are more comfortable with the term “site update” or “community update” than “fact sheet” and would be more inclined to read a document referred to as a site update than a fact sheet.

## Why This Is Important

Fact sheets are important because they keep community members informed and educated about the activities occurring at the Superfund site. While fact sheets are useful and appropriate throughout the Superfund process, they are required in only one instance, at the completion of the final engineering design. National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) 40 CFR §300.435(c)(3) states that “[a]fter the completion of the final engineering design, the lead agency shall issue a fact sheet and provide, as appropriate, a public briefing prior to the initiation of the remedial action.”

## Implementation

Fact sheets are used to inform the community about the Superfund process, particularly if site activities

*This and all tools in the Community Involvement Toolkit should be used in conjunction with the [\*\*Community Involvement Handbook\*\*](#), which provides guidance to EPA staff on how EPA typically plans and implements community involvement activities at Superfund sites.*

will take place over a long period of time. Fact sheets can inform the community about the site assessment process, or describe the preliminary findings and next steps after the assessment has been completed. A fact sheet can serve as a brief, easy-to-read summary of a lengthy proposed plan. A fact sheet explaining changes to a record of decision (ROD) can be strategically formatted to include a simple side-by-side comparison of the changes. Fact sheets can be a reassurance to the community that EPA is still involved and working toward site cleanup.

## When to Prepare Fact Sheets

Fact sheets can be useful:

- To provide informal technical assistance as part of a [\*technical assistance needs assessment\*](#).
- At the beginning and end of a site assessment.
- At the beginning and end of a remedial investigation.
- When the feasibility study is released.
- When a long, detailed proposed plan is released, and during the public comment period for the proposed plan.
- When the ROD is released or amended.
- When the engineering design is released, and before the remedial action is initiated.
- During remedial design/remedial action.
- When construction is complete.
- During a five-year review.
- When the site is proposed for deletion from the NPL.
- During an emergency removal or response.
- Whenever the community expresses a concern over a specific site activity or condition.
- When you perceive confusion in the community regarding a site-related issue.
- To clarify a misunderstanding.
- To explain technical issues.



While fact sheets are a good communication tool, they are not always recommended. Assess the situation when deciding whether or not to prepare a fact sheet:

- Do not use fact sheets to break bad news to the community. There are more effective tools to convey upsetting information.
- Do not rely solely on fact sheets because many people do not read them, and not everyone is likely to get one.

#### ***Fact Sheet for an Emergency Removal Activity: An Example***

*One Regional Office conducted an emergency removal of toxic chemicals released in a densely populated neighborhood. During the cleanup, EPA prepared and distributed four fact sheets to update the community as the work progressed. Each fact sheet was formatted to include “What we found,” “What we’re doing about it,” and “What you’re seeing.” Fact sheets also provided contact information. The community expressed appreciation for the emergency response work EPA performed, despite the Agency’s significant footprint.*

### **Fact Sheet Basics**

#### **Drafting a Fact Sheet**

Before writing a fact sheet, determine your audience and message. Aim for no more than three primary messages. Limiting the number of messages helps keep fact sheets short and simple, and easy to digest. Superfund focus groups prefer several single-issue/single-sheet updates spread throughout the year, rather than one multiple-page update.

Generally, text prepared for the general public should be written at the eighth-grade level. However, check site demographics and write at the grade level indicated. Avoid bureaucratic jargon or highly technical language. If necessary, translate fact sheets into languages other than English.

#### **Fact Sheet Formatting**

Fact sheets should be easy to read and understand. Keep the following tips in mind as you format your fact sheet:

- Use a 10-to-12-point typeface with serif, such as Times New Roman that you see here.
- Keep sentences and word lengths as short as possible.
- Place the fact sheet date, publication number, site name, and an EPA logo prominently in the banner.
- Use a catchy, but not hokey, headline.
- Always start with the primary message in the upper left corner.
- Place pertinent facts or important information in text boxes, and vary the color of the text boxes.
- Make fact sheets visually interesting by breaking up text with pictures, graphs, or diagrams to convey information. Too much text and not enough white space will make the page appear boring and daunting.
- Include the names and contact information for the remedial project manager and community involvement coordinator.

Where relevant, include special information, such as dates of upcoming meetings, and location and hours of the [\*information repository\*](#).

#### **Fact Sheet Distribution**

Do not rely on a [\*mailing list\*](#). Identify your primary target area (usually the area most impacted or likely to be impacted by the site), and then mail fact sheets to all residences within that target area, even if you have to address them as “An important environmental message for the family at ...” Consider emailing the fact sheet if you have an updated list of email addresses. Use [\*public notices\*](#) to let the community know when fact sheets are available. Use press releases, public service announcements, community websites, social media pages and listservs, and public TV and radio for distribution. State where fact sheets are available and provide a contact name, address, and phone number.

#### **The Proposed Plan Fact Sheet**

The purpose of a proposed plan is to facilitate public involvement in the Superfund remedy selection process. The proposed plan presents the lead agency’s remedial alternatives and preferred alternative; explains the rationale for selection of the preferred alternative; identifies any proposed waivers to cleanup standards that are based on applicable or relevant and appropriate requirements (ARARs), such as technical impracticability waivers; and lists documents used to support EPA’s decision. Because the proposed plan



is often lengthy, it is recommended that a shorter, easier-to-understand summary of key findings and conclusions be prepared to help ensure that it will be read by the widest possible audience. [\*A Guide to Preparing Superfund Proposed Plans, Records of Decision, and Other Remedy Selection Decisions Documents\*](#) recommends the development of a proposed plan fact sheet whenever a more detailed proposed plan is prepared.

The proposed plan fact sheet should be no more than 8 to 10 pages long. The front page should be designed to attract the attention of the general public. It should begin by highlighting the proposed remedy and encourage the reader to submit comments. The fact sheet should then describe the risks posed by the site and the alternatives considered. The back page should include information on how and where the public can obtain copies of the proposed plan, and who the public should contact with questions and requests for further information. An example, two-page proposed plan fact sheet, is presented in Section 3 of *A Guide to Preparing Superfund Proposed Plans, Records of Decision, and Other Remedy Selection Decisions Documents*. Be sure to announce that the proposed plan is available for review and comment in the information repository, and include the address and hours of operation, as well as a phone number for

requesting copies. Include instructions on how and when to submit public comments.

## Tips

- Hand out fact sheets as people enter meetings or hearings, or place them on chairs before the meeting starts. Have extra copies available, and encourage people to take copies to friends.
- Bring the latest fact sheet with you on community visits, and hand it out to residents.
- Ask permission to leave several facts sheets at churches, clubs, libraries, and stores in the target area.
- Ask school principals to send home a fact sheet with every student.
- Distribute fact sheets door-to-door with door hangers; never use a mailbox for anything but mail.
- Pay to have the fact sheet printed in the local paper.
- Offer fact sheets as inserts in neighborhood association newsletters.
- Contaminant information in fact sheets should contain the chemical name, media contaminated, and contaminant concentration at the site versus the normal range.
- Consider adding fact sheets to an appropriate community website or social media page.