35th Avenue Superfund Site
Collaborating for Success in an Environmental Justice Community
Challenges and Triumphs in a Collaborative Community Outreach Effort

Presented by

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Topics
- North Birmingham Community
- EPA’s History in the North Birmingham Community
- Site Information
- Communication and Outreach (90-day effort)
- Process
- Challenges
- Triumphs and Successes with Working Together
- Lessons Learned
- Status Today

Video Clips
- EPA Public Meeting, October 1, 2012
- Mayor Bell pledging support to EPA, December 18, 2012

North Birmingham Community
Three neighborhoods in site boundary
- Collegeville, Fairmont, and Harriman Park
Environmental justice community
- 38% of households with income below poverty level
- 92% unemployment rate

EPA’s History in the Community
- “One EPA” effort
- RCRA working on Walter Coke Plant since 1984
- Superfund became involved in December 2011
Why is Superfund Here?
- RCRA sampling activities showed possible off-site contamination
- Needed to inform 2,000+ property owners of the need for site access and sampling

Community Outreach Activities
- Conduct initial Community Outreach efforts for 90 days
  - First 60 days of Outreach effort
    - Mailed access requests about 2,000 properties
    - Distributed flyers to churches, libraries and meeting halls
    - Held public availability meetings/attended neighborhood association meetings
    - Advertised in local newspapers
    - Established local and toll-free telephone hotline
    - Established outreach office in community
    - Made radio announcements
    - Made “robocalls”
  - Last 30 days of Outreach effort
    - Received 1,188 signed access agreements out of 2,049 properties in sampling area
    - Community volunteers conducted door-to-door outreach activities
    - Extended to accommodate community needs

Process
- Receive access agreement
  - Verify if address in sampling area
  - Enter information in database
  - Make file
- Schedule sampling
  - Call each resident to schedule sampling
  - Complete record of communication
    - Legal representation
    - HRS scoring package information
- Schedule sampling
- Make file

Challenges
- Distrust from the Community
- Litigation
- Timeframe
- Vacant properties
- Media visibility
- Concurrent site access and sampling activities
- Split-sampling requests

What Made Us Successful
- Went above and beyond traditional outreach
- Established credibility in the community
- Worked as team members
- Met with key stakeholders
- Listened to residents’ concerns
- Didn’t make false promises
- Made ourselves available
- Open to changing strategy “mid-stream”
- Focused outreach to churches and other community organizations

Working Together ...
- EPA, City and Community Collaboration
  - Not your typical sampling effort
  - City of Birmingham support
  - Community-wide assistance
- Met with Collegeville, Fairmont and Harriman Park neighborhood association presidents and attended their meetings
- Held special meetings with pastors
- Met with Mayor and staff
Working Together …

What Did We Learn?
- Community trust can be gained
- Regulators, local authorities and communities can work together, respectfully, each accomplishing their specific goals
- Community groups are vital to reaching non-responsive residents
- Know the community before sending out mailings

So…. How Did We Do?
- As of July 20, 2013
  - Received 1,188 signed access agreements (out of 2,049 properties in sampling area)
  - Over 1,100 properties sampled
  - Results released for 889 properties sampled to date
  - Community involvement plan released for public comment in June 2013
  - North Birmingham Community Coalition established on July 17, 2013