



Technical Assistance Services *for Communities* St. Louis Airport Site and Coldwater Creek Technical Assistance Needs Assessment Report

Contract No.: 68HERH21A0018

Call Order No.: 14.0.0 OSRTI – Regional & Headquarters TASC/CI Support

Technical Directive No.: TD R7 6.0.14 SLAPS

St. Louis Airport Site and Coldwater Creek Technical Assistance Needs Assessment Report

Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) program led this Technical Assistance Needs Assessment (TANA) for the community near the St. Louis Airport Site and Coldwater Creek (the sites). Its purpose is to better understand the current technical assistance needs of the community related to the sites' cleanup.

The recommendations in this TANA Report come from conversations with 31 community members and stakeholders in January, February, March, and April 2024. People who participated in these conversations were asked a set of standard questions, including questions about their awareness of technical support available through EPA. Once the TANA Report was drafted, TASC and EPA staff attended and presented at community meetings on June 25, 2024, to discuss the TANA's findings and recommendations, and meeting attendees' priorities. EPA's TASC program funded this report. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the policies, actions or positions of EPA.

Part 1: Site Background Information

The St. Louis Airport Site (SLAPS), Hazelwood Interim Storage Site (HISS)/Futura Coatings Co., and SLAPS vicinity properties (VPs) are parts of the Superfund site also known as the North St. Louis County site. From 1942 to 1957, under contracts with the U.S. government, operators processed uranium ore at facilities in downtown St. Louis. Residues and scrap metal resulting from uranium processing at the downtown facilities began to be stored at SLAPS in 1946. In 1962, the scrap metal stored at SLAPS was sold and moved to Knoxville, Tennessee. In 1966, the remaining stored material was sold and moved to HISS for interim storage. Residues from these operations contaminated other properties nearby, along haul routes, and Coldwater Creek. Coldwater Creek flows through northern St. Louis County until it discharges into the Missouri River. Of the North St. Louis County sites, SLAPS is the farthest upstream, approximately 14 miles from the Missouri River. The land area of the North St. Louis sites consists of over 770 individual properties, with approximately 650 of those in the 10-year floodplain of Coldwater Creek.

EPA added the sites to the National Priorities List (NPL) in 1989. In 1997, congress passed a law that transferred responsibility for the cleanup of releases related to the nation's early atomic energy program execution to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). USACE is now conducting cleanup activities at SLAPS and SLDS as the lead federal agency. EPA provides regulatory oversight of the cleanup efforts. Cleanup includes soil removal and disposal. Sampling and cleanup are ongoing.

Part 2: Perspectives on Community Technical Assistance Needs

In November 2023, prior to the TANA Kick Off meeting with the community, eleven stakeholders participated in preliminary/initial discussions with EPA and TASC staff to share their thoughts about the methods of outreach that would be most successful in reaching community members during the TANA process. They provided feedback about the best methods of publicizing a TANA process, locations and dates for the kickoff meeting, and people to include in the TANA process. These recommendations informed EPA's TANA process.

Community members and stakeholders who participated in the TANA conversations shared their perspectives on community technical assistance needs as they related to the sites. The 31 community members and stakeholders involved with the TANA represented organizations, such as Coldwater Creek Just the Facts, Just Moms STL, Missouri Coalition for the Environment and Sisters of St. Mary (SSM) Healthcare. Residents, property owners, members of local government and two USACE representatives also participated. The perspectives shared by the two USACE representatives were incorporated into the TANA report separate from the community perspectives documented below.

Community Perspectives

All interviewees are familiar with the sites. Some people are more familiar with site activities and some people have a more cursory knowledge. Several people said that they had lived in the area for years but only recently found out about the sites. Interviewees said that they found out about the sites from a variety of organizations and sources, including Just Moms STL, the film Atomic Homefront and after the closing of Jana Elementary School. Nearly all participants expressed concerns about the sites with regard to health, and especially the health of children. Groups working on site issues mentioned by participants include Coldwater Creek Just the Facts, Just Moms STL, Missouri Coalition for the Environment and STL Toxic Aware. Outreach suggestions included references to the effectiveness of social media, mailers and in-person engagement, especially when partnering with local organizations and community leaders.

Most participants said the relationship between the community and federal agencies is negative or nonexistent. Many interviewees said that the community distrusts the federal agencies involved at the sites because of a lack of information sharing and clarity about the cleanup process. Several interviewees indicated that community members perceive that they have been misled by the federal agencies involved in cleanup. Most participants perceive that residents did not receive enough information about the sites. Several people said that the information provided was overly technical and confusing. One person indicated that communication has improved with EPA involvement. Several participants mentioned that USACE holds meetings at times when community members cannot attend. Other interviewees stated that the federal agencies provided sufficient technical information. All interviewees perceive that overcoming community members' distrust of federal agencies would be challenging and that honesty and transparency are critical to repairing the relationship.

The information below summarizes suggestions, comments and information gathered from the TANA conversations with community members. They are grouped by topic.

Cleanup Concerns

- The cleanup should have been completed years ago.
- Cleanup levels are not protective.
- There are additional areas that need to be tested for contamination.
- Ongoing cleanup and construction are moving dirt and spreading contamination in the community.
- Although the people interviewed are familiar with the sites, there are still many community members who are not aware of contamination from the sites.
- The cleanup process is confusing. Some people perceive that an EPA-led cleanup would be more protective than USACE's current cleanup.
- Coldwater Creek experiences recurrent flooding that has spread contamination beyond the area being remediated and often into peoples' homes.

Impacts of Contamination on the Community

- Contamination affects the value of homes in the area.
- Coldwater Creek is no longer a community asset.
- Children living in the area are not safe playing in their backyards or at parks on-site.
- Homeowners are not aware of contamination and new homes are being built in the area.
- Signs that clearly indicate the risk of exposure to contamination should be posted around Coldwater Creek. Current signage posted is insufficient.
- Construction workers completing infrastructure projects, such as improvements to roads and utilities, are at risk from contamination.

Health Impact Concerns

- The sites may be impacting the health and safety of community members.
- Participants said that people are dying of rare cancers and autoimmune disorders and suffering from miscarriages because of contamination from the sites.
- Many people who lived in the area have moved away and may not be aware that site contamination could have contributed to their illnesses.
- There is a need for resources for people who are sick. People are dying because they cannot afford the healthcare they need. There is no ongoing tracking of health impacts caused by the sites. Illnesses should be tracked and cataloged as part of a database.

Mistrust/Misinformation

- Some community members perceive that federal agencies involved in the cleanup were not truthful with the community about the extent of contamination and cleanup to avoid taking responsibility for their role in the sites' contamination.
- Several interviewees said that they have been given conflicting information about the sites.
- Some community members stated that USACE does not communicate clearly about site-related information.
- Some interviewees said that it is difficult to learn about or attend USACE meetings.
- Some community members worry that USACE representatives share misleading information in online forums without identifying themselves.

Miscellaneous Concerns

- There is no way to hold USACE accountable for its actions.
- Community members living in areas impacted by the sites should be compensated and included in existing legislation to provide preventative and ongoing healthcare.
- Funding and politics might prevent the cleanup process from moving forward.
- Property owners will not allow access for sampling due to concerns about property values.
- USACE provides information on its website, but community members might not be aware of the resources that are available.
- Information about the cleanup is technical and evolving and even though USACE provides information, many community members do not understand it.

Ideas for Outreach

General Guidance

- A combination of approaches, including social media and more traditional forms of direct outreach, is most likely to be successful for reaching stakeholders.
- Outreach to homeowners and people living in the affected area is critical to increase community awareness of the cleanup.
- Outreach should include contacting people who lived in the area in the past but have since relocated.
- Outreach efforts should partner with community organizations where possible.
- Updates should be provided quarterly at a minimum, unless there are significant site updates, in which case updates should be more frequent.
- Word of mouth is often the most effective way to reach people. Community leaders can share information as they receive it from EPA and USACE.

Virtual Events and Outreach

- Zoom meetings or hybrid meetings can be helpful ways to allow more people to attend.
- Using social media such as Facebook can be a good way to spread information. Community groups active on social media can then share the information.
- An email listserv should provide consistent updates.
- Alumni association groups on Facebook can provide information to people who have moved away from the area.
- Radio and news outlets can provide information about the sites.
- A telephone hotline could be helpful for people interested in learning about the sites.

Printed Materials

- Signs are needed at Coldwater Creek to prevent access. Signage should include graphics that can be understood by children as well as information on the type of contamination at the sites.
- Posting flyers or sending postcards to homes in the area is helpful, especially for older people who do not use computers.
- Simple fact sheets would help the community understand information.
- Post flyers in community centers, at churches and at events, and then use word of mouth.

- Municipal and school newsletters can share information about the sites. Information should also be shared directly with students.

In-person Events/Outreach

- Several interviewees noted that going door to door might be the most effective way to reach people living in the area.
- There is a need for in-person communication, especially for issues that are sensitive and affect people's lives such as site contamination. People will take information more seriously if it is shared with them in person.
- Meetings should use plain language so that everyone can understand the information.
- Many meetings are redundant for frequent attendees because new people ask the same questions that were answered at previous meetings.
- Listening sessions with a technical moderator would be helpful.
- Several people said that a Community Advisory Group could help inform people about the sites.
- Local events that offer potential opportunities for outreach include:
 - The Valley of Flowers Festival.
 - The Hispanic Cultural Festival.
 - St. Louis Community College could host a symposium about the Manhattan Project.
 - Parent Teacher Association meetings and school events.

Cleanup Information Needed by Residents

- The extent of contamination, ideally shown on a map.
- An updated plain language timeline of cleanup activities, including past actions and next steps.
- The roles of each government agency during cleanup.
- How the transportation of contaminated materials impacts the community.
- The protectiveness of cleanup standards.

Suggestions for Technical Assistance

- A technical advisor to translate technical documents.
- Plain language workshops.
- In-person events/listening sessions to answer community questions.
- Office hours hosted by EPA and USACE staff during which community members can get in-person answers to site questions.
- A telephone hotline providing information about cleanup status and other site information.
- Help with the formation of a Community Advisory Group.
- One-page fact sheets with graphics.
- Information to help children living in the area understand the potential risk posed by the sites.
- Searchable maps of contamination showing homes in the area.
- Resources for healthcare providers to screen for conditions related to contamination exposure.
- An online dashboard of information that tracks cleanup metrics and provides live updates.

Stakeholders Needing More Support

- Some community members have physical disabilities that may prevent them from attending meetings.
- Some interviewees said that translating materials into Spanish might be helpful for some community members.

Potential Partner Organizations

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| • Just Moms STL | • Local schools |
| • Coldwater Creek Just the Facts | • Local churches |
| • Missouri Coalition for the Environment | • Political representatives |
| • STL Toxic Aware | • Fire Department |
| • North County, Inc. | • Healthcare providers |
| • Missouri History Museum | • Missouri Department of Natural Resources |

USACE Perspectives

Two USACE representatives participated in TANA interviews. They shared their perspectives on stakeholder relations and community engagement:

- Both participants perceive that communication has improved recently.
- They noted that USACE holds monthly meetings and uses [social media](#) to post updates and clarify misinformation.
- One participant said that they have not had success using mailers because the mailers are mistaken for junk mail and discarded.
- Both people stated that the information they provided to the community was clear and easy to understand.
- They have engaged with community groups who use social media to reach the public effectively.
- Both people noted that community members are concerned about the extent of contamination. One person noted that USACE has an obligation to protect property owners' information and cannot release all information to the public.
- They understand that people are concerned that the cleanup is not moving quickly enough and perceive that providing them with a better understanding of the process and the role of each federal agency would be helpful for the community.
- The participants suggested that a third party could explain site information in a way that would not be perceived as biased and that a meeting with the community and representatives from each federal agency would help to streamline communications.

Part 3: TASC Technical Assistance Recommendations

The TANA Technical Assistance Matrix below provides recommendations to address the community needs shared above. The recommendations are specific to technical assistance for the North County community with regard to understanding the science, regulations, and policy related to environmental issues at the North County Sites. They could be fulfilled by Federal agencies, with support from TASC or other technical assistance programs, where appropriate and as allowed by each Federal agency's policies, laws, and regulations. During the community meetings held on June 25, 2024 at the JFK Community Center in Florissant, Missouri, attendees discussed the draft TANA and recommendations. Attendees were asked to fill out a brief prioritization survey ranking the five TANA recommendations in order of preference. The results of the prioritization surveys indicated that participants' rankings for technical assistance priorities are:

- 1) Provide a technical advisor to explain site-related information.
- 2) Assist community members in the formation of a Technical Community Advisory Group (TCAG).
- 3) Host and attend in-person community meetings on an ongoing basis.
- 4) Provide frequent updates online and on social media.
- 5) Distribute information directly to peoples' homes with direct communication.

Recommendation for Technical Assistance	Community Members Served	Suggested Frequency or Timeline	Suggested Method for Support/Distribution
1. Provide a <u>technical advisor</u> to explain site-related information: a) Host meetings with community members and a technical advisor to allow information sharing. b) Allow a third-party technical expert to review site documents and share with the community. c) Provide a trusted mediator between federal agencies and community members.	All community members	In conjunction with site developments and on an ongoing basis	Meetings can be held in conjunction with community meetings and held virtually or in person.
2. Assist community members in the formation of a <u>Technical Community Advisory Group</u> (TCAG) that: a) Meets regularly to discuss site-related information with EPA. b) Represents the views of community members. c) Serves as a direct conduit of information to and from the community.	All community members, especially people living on or near the sites	Formation as soon as possible, with meetings on an ongoing basis	Meetings can be held regularly in person or virtually.

3. Host and attend <u>in-person community meetings</u> on an ongoing basis to: a) Explain the role of each federal agency involved in site issues. b) Provide plain language information about the sites, including the timeline for cleanup, the extent of contamination and site-related health risks. c) Listen to community members' concerns about the sites. d) Provide introductory information about the Superfund program for anyone new to the process and interested in learning about the sites. e) Coordinate with local events/leaders to ensure that attendees are aware that EPA has partners in the community.	All community members	At least quarterly, in conjunction with scheduled community events where applicable	Federal Agency/contractor staff host the meetings and the public can attend events in person.
4. Provide frequent <u>updates online and on social media</u> that: a) Can be shared by partner organizations and community members. b) Give information about site developments and upcoming meetings in a regularly updated dashboard. c) Provide simple explanatory graphics, including maps.	All community members	Ongoing basis	Federal Agency website, listserv and Facebook page.
5. Distribute information directly to peoples' homes with <u>direct communication</u> in a manner that: a) Shares updates and information about the sites and upcoming meetings in a format that is accessible to the community. b) Is completed in conjunction with conversations with residents, when possible. c) Partners with local organizations and community leaders that residents trust. They may be more willing to open their doors to talk with them. d) Provides information about active cleanup areas, including signs posted with easy-to-understand symbology.	All community members, especially people living on or near the sites	As soon as possible, and in conjunction with the release of site documents	The following organizations could conduct door-to-door outreach: • Federal Agency staff and/or partner organizations. • Subcontracted organizations, potentially with experience conducting door-to-door work. • Key community leaders. Local news outlets can share information via newspaper, television or radio.

TASC Contact Information

Project Manager
Sophie Delzell
540-617-8011
sdelzell@skeo.com

Program Manager
Tiffany Reed
847-786-8767
treed@skeo.com

Skeo Vice President, Director of Finance and Contracts
Briana Branham
434-226-4284
bbranham@skeo.com

TASC Quality Control Monitor
Bruce Engelbert
703-953-6675
bengelbert@skeo.com