



# Technical Assistance Services for Communities

## Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares Superfund Site Technical Assistance Needs Assessment

**Contract No.:** EP-W-13-015

**Task Order No.:** 2

**Technical Directive No.:** R9 #8 Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares TANA

### Technical Assistance Needs Assessment – Final Report

**Site Name:** Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares Superfund Site  
**Site Location:** Rialto, CA  
**Date:** March 16, 2015

### Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) program conducted this Technical Assistance Needs Assessment (TANA) for the Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares Superfund site community. The purpose of this needs assessment is to better understand the current technical assistance needs of the Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares site community related to the cleanup of the site and to gauge community interest.

The recommendations contained in this summary are based on:

- Background site and community information gathered online.<sup>1</sup>
- Review of the site's July 2013 Community Involvement Plan (CIP).
- Conversations and email correspondence with EPA Remedial Project Manager Wayne Praskins and EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Viola Cooper between July 2014 and February 2015.
- In-person conversations with the following community members and stakeholders on October 7-8, 2014:
  - Tom Crowley, Assistant General Manager, West Valley Water District
  - Marcus Fuller, Public Works Director,<sup>2</sup> and Katie Nickel, Senior Administrative Analyst, City of Rialto
  - Alejandro Juarez, resident and EPA Superfund Job Training Initiative graduate
  - Penny Newman, Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice
  - Mayor Deborah Robertson, City of Rialto, with consultants Luvina Beckley and Otis Jackson
- Telephone conversations with the following community members and stakeholders in December 2014 and January 2015.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The end of this document provides a list of information sources.

<sup>2</sup> Marcus Fuller is no longer with the city.

- Juanita Chan, Science Project Lead, Rialto Unified School District
- Art Rivera, Deputy Director, San Bernardino County Solid Waste Management and Ralph Murphy, Geo-Logic Associates

## **Site Background and Past Community Involvement**

The Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares Superfund site, formerly known as the B.F. Goodrich site, is located in the Rialto-Colton Groundwater Basin in western San Bernardino County, California. The site includes a 160-acre industrial area in Rialto, California, where volatile organic compounds and perchlorate have contaminated soil and groundwater, and also includes contaminated groundwater that has spread from the 160-acre source area.

The U.S. Army acquired the 160-acre area in 1942 as part of a larger area to inspect, consolidate and store railcars transporting bombs, ammunition and other ordnance to the Port of Los Angeles. After the U.S. government sold the property in 1946, portions of the 160-acre Rialto site have been used by different private companies to manufacture and test solid-fuel rocket propellant and rocket motors, fireworks, flares, and other pyrotechnics.

In the 1980s, trichloroethylene (TCE), a volatile organic compound, was discovered in a water supply well in what is now part of the site. Perchlorate was discovered in the groundwater in 1997. In 2002, the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board (the Water Board), a state agency, began efforts to identify sources of contamination and plan the cleanup. The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has also directed and overseen soil testing on a portion of the site since 2005.

EPA began assisting the Water Board in 2002 and became the lead cleanup agency for the site in 2008. EPA formally added the site to its Superfund National Priorities List in 2009 and adopted a cleanup plan for the first of two planned groundwater cleanup projects in 2010. The first cleanup project is the “Source Area Operable Unit,” which addresses the most contaminated groundwater at the site, beneath the 160-acre area. EPA is currently conducting testing needed to develop the cleanup plan for the second project. The second project is the “Mid-Basin Operable Unit,” which addresses groundwater in the southern portion of the site, where contamination levels are lower but still exceed drinking water requirements.

EPA held a joint public meeting with the California Department of Public Health in 2009 to discuss and explain the Superfund site and the cleanup process. At a public meeting in 2010, EPA presented the proposed cleanup plan for the Source Area Operable Unit. In 2010, EPA also interviewed community members in the Rialto-Colton area to inform a Community Involvement Plan (CIP). Additionally, EPA has provided fact sheets to update the community on the site status, provided frequent updates to the site webpage and held periodic meetings with municipal representatives and other stakeholders. In July 2014, through EPA’s Superfund Job Training Initiative program, EPA provided training to 17 local residents to prepare them for environmental jobs related to the cleanup of the site.

---

<sup>3</sup> Some individuals did not respond to requests for needs assessment conversations.

## **Review of Community Involvement Plan**

As part of the information gathering for the TANA, TASC reviewed the site's CIP. EPA conducted interviews with residents, business representatives, elected officials and other stakeholders in the Rialto-Colton area in October and December 2010 to inform the site's CIP. EPA finalized the CIP in July 2013.

The CIP first provides a community profile and groups community concerns into three categories: Environmental/Human Health, Superfund Cleanup Activity and Communications, and Public Education. Within each category, EPA summarizes specific concerns and provides responses. The next section is EPA's Community Involvement Action Plan (Action Plan). EPA developed the Action Plan to address the issues and concerns identified during the CIP interviews, and it outlines the activities EPA plans to carry out to provide information to the community and encourage community involvement in the cleanup process. The Action Plan was the focus of the TASC review of the CIP.

The Action Plan indicates that EPA will use a variety of methods to provide cleanup information to the community, including:

- Fact sheets, flyers and handouts.
- Public meetings and open houses.
- Site website.
- Information repository at the Rialto Branch Library and at the EPA regional office.
- Site mailing list.
- Door-to-door notifications as necessary during fieldwork in neighborhoods.
- Public notices and press releases in local newspapers.
- Advertisements for opportunities for community members to provide input in the cleanup decision-making process.
- Plain language use to help communicate technical information to the community.
- EPA staff available to address community questions.
- EPA cleanup updates and presentations to community groups or city councils upon request.

To reach the large Spanish-speaking community in the Rialto-Colton area, the Action Plan specifies:

- Providing a Spanish language interpreter at community meetings.
- Translating key documents in Spanish.
- Publishing fact sheets in both English and Spanish.
- Having a bilingual Community Involvement Coordinator available to make presentations to community members.
- Working with local organizations to reach out to the Spanish-speaking community.

The Action Plan also provides information about the federal Technical Assistance Grant (TAG), which can be awarded to an incorporated nonprofit community organization affected by the site to hire an independent technical advisor to review cleanup documents. Another tool mentioned in

the Action Plan is the Community Advisory Group (CAG), a self-forming and self-governing stakeholder group that meets to discuss site issues, learn about the cleanup process and provide feedback to EPA. Both the TAG and CAG are tools that rely on interested community members to take the initiative in applying for the grant or forming a group. The EPA Community Involvement Coordinator is available to provide more information and support to parties interested in pursuing these tools.

### **Perspectives on Community Technical Assistance Needs from Community Conversations**

Additional information gathering for the TANA came through conversations with community members and stakeholders conducted from October 2014 to January 2015.<sup>4</sup> These participants in the needs assessment shared a variety of concerns related to the community's potential technical assistance needs. Some concerns were shared by all participants, while others were voiced by some participants or groups. In this section, local government participants refer to representatives and consultants of the City of Rialto and San Bernardino County. The other participants are referred to as community stakeholders.

One concern shared by all participants is the relatively low awareness of and lack of interest in the site cleanup in the community. This was also reflected in the difficulty of identifying community members who might be interested in participating in the TANA conversations. Participants shared possible solutions for improved outreach and engagement, including potential venues and special considerations given the community's demographics. Additionally, participants mentioned some misconceptions that surround the contamination and the cleanup, as well as some concerns about local government and EPA. Participants also identified specific technical assistance and other needs. The subsections below provide more details about these perspectives.

#### *Low Public Awareness about the Superfund Site*

A primary concern shared by all participants is that the general public is relatively unaware of the Superfund site and the cleanup. The participants agreed that the community does not have a clear understanding of the cleanup process or the contamination. One community stakeholder noted that there are some people who are very aware, but that despite the City's best efforts to share information, the average community member is either not reading or not understanding the information. Participants shared different potential explanations for why awareness may be low at the site and offered some potential solutions to increase public awareness and engagement. These are summarized in the following table:

---

<sup>4</sup> These community members and stakeholders were recommended by EPA or other participants.

<b>Explanations for Low Public Awareness Offered by Participants</b>	<b>Solutions to Increase Public Awareness and Engagement Offered by Participants</b>
<p>The issue does not seem to interest the community. The community is a bedroom community and residents tend not to be very engaged in the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider televising meetings or workshops so some people can watch from home.</li> <li>• Frame the cleanup and contamination in relation to public health to raise awareness.</li> <li>• Frame the cleanup as an economic issue to show the benefits of cleanup.</li> </ul>
<p>Community members are not understanding the material or the message.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the education level of community members when developing educational materials.</li> <li>• Use more visuals, including maps, when conveying information.</li> <li>• Limit use of technical terms.</li> <li>• Use clear language.</li> <li>• Make sure information is in both English and Spanish.</li> <li>• Provide an FAQ fact sheet for City departments, agencies or related organizations to help staff answer community questions.</li> <li>• Provide a resource or website with the latest updates for City departments, agencies or related organizations to share with community members.</li> </ul>
<p>Outreach methods have not been effective at reaching all parts of the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include an informational pamphlet with the water bill.</li> <li>• Have separate meetings for community members in venues other than City Hall so community members feel more comfortable speaking up.</li> <li>• Consider entertainment-based venues, such as publishing a one-to-two-page article in a community magazine with lots of pictures and limited text; conducting outreach at events with music, food and raffles; having television personalities or actors teach the material; and placing spots on local radio stations.</li> <li>• Consider more outreach to the Hispanic community through Voz Latina and Spanish television channels.</li> <li>• Have more door-to-door outreach.</li> <li>• Use more online outreach, such as social media, but understand that not everyone has access.</li> <li>• Have ways of disseminating information other than through council meetings.</li> <li>• Have more coordination with municipalities to perform outreach, as municipalities tend to receive better attendance at their events and more attention than the County and Responsible Parties.</li> <li>• Make sure local industry, business owners and restaurateurs are included in targeted outreach.</li> <li>• Enlist help from the Rotary, Kiwanis Club, Senior Center, Rialto Unified School District and other organizations to assist with outreach.</li> </ul>

Community stakeholders highlighted some considerations for outreach based on community demographics. Community stakeholders described the site community as low-income, working class and diverse. Participants brought up electronic communication, with some feeling that more outreach should happen online and others highlighting that not everyone has computer access. Also, community stakeholders mentioned the importance of discussing the economics of the cleanup with the local low-income communities, particularly as it does or does not affect water rates, as that would help engage the community. Participants emphasized the need to make the information accessible, in plain language and bilingual in English and Spanish. A local government participant mentioned outreach to youth as one way to reach adults who may not speak English, as youth may be able to help translate. One participant mentioned that some youth outreach is already taking place through the Rialto Unified School District. One community stakeholder suggested dressing more casually as appropriate when providing educational outreach, particularly for the Hispanic community, as some community members may not trust some government agencies and may be cautious about attending events.

#### *Cleanup and Contamination Misconceptions and Other Concerns*

Some local government participants mentioned that residents seem to have a false impression that the cleanup will address everything and that since there is no longer a surcharge on their bill,<sup>5</sup> the cleanup has been completed. Additionally, a community stakeholder expressed concern about a misconception that perchlorate is something that is visibly detectable in the water.

Some community stakeholders also mentioned trust as an important consideration. Their concern is that some community members have low trust in representatives from the local government, the water board and the potentially responsible parties. Because of this, one community stakeholder mentioned the importance of having separate community meetings about the Superfund cleanup that are not held at City Hall.

Some local government participants expressed concern that EPA has not been following the Community Involvement Action Plan and has not been providing enough fact sheets for the community. A participant also shared a concern that EPA may not be collecting information related to potential health impacts due to a liability concern.

#### *Specific Technical Assistance and Other Needs*

Although this TANA is designed to focus on technical assistance needs, all needs expressed by the participants are documented. The following table summarizes specific technical assistance needs as well as other needs shared by participants.

---

<sup>5</sup> In 2004, the City of Rialto levied a “perchlorate surcharge” on the water bills of residents and businesses served by the City. The surcharge ended in 2012.

<b>Technical Assistance Needs</b>	<p><i>Informational Needs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updates on EPA activities and how progress is helping EPA meet its long-term goal.</li> <li>• Cleanup process.</li> <li>• Discussion of how the remedy works.</li> <li>• What will be cleaned up under Superfund?</li> <li>• Plume location and extent.</li> <li>• Timeline and timeframe for community check-ins.</li> <li>• Site and area maps.</li> <li>• ATSDR (Agency of Toxic Substances and Disease Registry) perchlorate exposure case study.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><i>Procedural/Structural Needs</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-agency task force to provide a venue for discussion.</li> <li>• Making sure the community is informed over generations due to the duration of the cleanup.</li> <li>• An ongoing process to look at community needs.</li> <li>• Use of California DTSC's (Department of Toxic Substances Control) Public Participation Manual as a resource for working with communities.</li> <li>• Making sure there is buy-in from the community. The Rialto community would like to have a role in delivering information to the community.</li> </ul>
<b>Other Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic benefits for the local community.</li> <li>• More job trainings in the area.</li> <li>• A monitoring and reporting body.</li> <li>• An EPA program to help Rialto, Colton, Fontana and West Valley Water District get wells back in service.</li> </ul>

## Recommendations for Technical Assistance

This section describes recommendations to help meet the community's needs based on conversations with community members and stakeholders and a review of EPA's Community Involvement Action Plan. These recommendations are specific to technical assistance and could be fulfilled by EPA and other involved entities, with support from the TASC program where appropriate.

1. Continue to implement the strategies outlined in EPA's Community Involvement Action Plan to help increase awareness and understanding of the site. Although the Action Plan was completed in 2013, the community conversations that informed it were held in 2010. Over the past several years, EPA has been updating the site webpage, providing fact sheets, issuing press releases and having meetings with municipal representatives and other stakeholders. Despite this, based on conversations conducted to inform this TANA, the community still shares some of the concerns outlined in the CIP and has some additional concerns. Overall, it appears that there is low community awareness of the site and the cleanup, with a potential lack of community interest. TASC believes the community could benefit from continued implementation of the Action Plan, with the following additional considerations:
  - a. Provide 1-2 fact sheets or informational handouts each year. Fact sheets or handouts could include information about the following topics:
    - i. General cleanup update.
    - ii. FAQ about the site.
    - iii. Cleanup as it relates to health.
    - iv. Cleanup as it relates to economics and cost.
  - b. Make sure informational materials include many visuals and maps.
  - c. Explore alternate outreach venues:
    - i. Community magazine.
    - ii. Water bill inserts.
    - iii. Televised meetings or workshops.
    - iv. Radio spots.
    - v. Online and social media.
  - d. When hosting townhall or community meetings about the Superfund cleanup, continue using community-friendly venues such as community centers.
2. Check in with community stakeholders after a specified period to revisit the TANA and look at community needs. Based on community interest at that time, consider developing a community outreach plan to broaden and deepen community engagement.
3. For community members interested in having a stronger role in community involvement, partner with existing nonprofit organizations or create a new nonprofit organization to apply for EPA grants. Grants such as the Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) or an environmental justice grant can provide financial assistance to nonprofit organizations to hire an independent technical advisor or to empower the community around local environmental issues.
4. Provide information to interested community members regarding how they can request further action by ATSDR to follow up on its 2012 Public Health Assessment.



## **Sources Consulted for Background Information on the Site and the Community**

- EPA Site Overview for Rockets, Fireworks, and Flares Superfund site. Available at: <http://www.epa.gov/region9/rff>.
  - [Community Involvement Plan, 2013.](#)
  - [Fact Sheet: Agreements End Nine Years of Litigation – Cleanup Work Proceeding, 2013.](#)

## **TASC Contact Information**

Project Manager  
Emily Chi  
434-975-6700 Ext. 238  
[echi@skeo.com](mailto:echi@skeo.com)

TASC Region 9 Coordinator  
Miranda Maupin  
434-975-6700 Ext. 227  
[mmaupin@skeo.com](mailto:mmaupin@skeo.com)

Task Order Manager  
Krissy Russell-Hedstrom  
719-256-6701  
[krissy@skeo.com](mailto:krissy@skeo.com)

Quality Control Monitor  
Eric Marsh  
434-975-6700 Ext. 276  
[emarsh@skeo.com](mailto:emarsh@skeo.com)