



# Guide To Community Involvement for Site Assessment Managers

Office of Emergency and Remedial Response  
Hazardous Site Evaluation Division 52046

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

START HERE




**SITE DISCOVERY**

Brief contractors who support site assessment activities on their roles and responsibilities in assisting EPA with community relations at a site.

**During the Preliminary Assessment**

- 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.




**For Further Information**

- 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, *Site Assessment: Evaluating Risks at Superfund Sites* (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 *Community Relations in Superfund: A Handbook* (EPA/540/R-92/009, January 1992).

**Guide to Community Involvement for Site Assessment Managers**

**TRANSITION SITE TO REMEDIAL STAFF**



- 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.

- 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).
  - 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.

**Inclusion on Final NPL**

# ENFORCEMENT

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Share technical and community insights with enforcement staff to ensure that the search for potentially responsible parties is initiated early.



## In the Event of a Site Evaluation Accomplished Finding

- If, at any point during the site assessment, EPA determines that no further action is necessary at the site, communicate this status.
- 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.

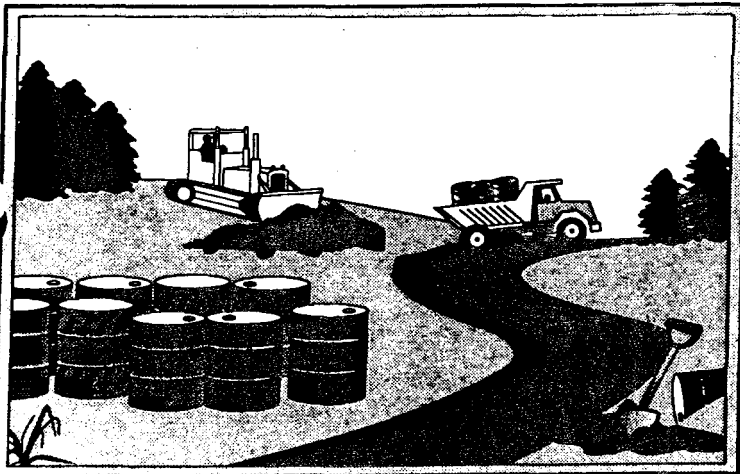
## In the Event of a Removal

- 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.

## During the Site Inspection (SI)

- 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':
  - 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.

These outreach activities have been successful at many sites.

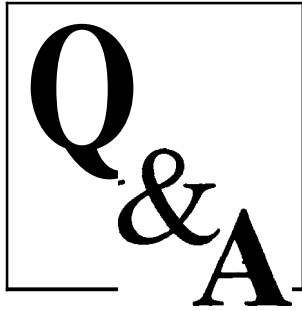


- Community interest is likely to heighten here. Interested parties should be made aware of the public comment period for proposed sites.
  - If warranted, compile a mailing list and send notice to interested parties.
  - If interest heightens, send a press release to the local media on the NPL proposal 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.

## PREPARE HAZARD RANKING SYSTEM (HRS) PACKAGE

- Reminders**
- 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.

## National Priorities List (NPL) Proposal



# Common Questions From the Public:

## A Primer for EPA Staff

EPA staff members and their support

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

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### 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.

## 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