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OFFICE OF
SOLID WASTE AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

OSWER Directive #9230.0-13

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Minimizing Problems Caused by Staff Turnover (Superfund Management Review: Recommendation #43 M,N,O)

FROM: Henry L. Longest II, Director
Office of Emergency and Remedial Response

TO: Director, Waste Management Division
Regions I, IV, V, VII, VIII
Director, Emergency and Remedial Response Division
Region II
Director, Hazardous Waste Management Division
Regions III, VI
Director, Toxic and Waste Management Division
Region IX
Director, Hazardous Waste Division
Region X

Purpose: To minimize community relations problems caused by the frequent turnover of EPA Superfund staff.

Background: The Superfund Management Review (SMR) found that staff turnover often hinders communication between EPA staff and affected communities. The SMR suggests that many important goals of the Superfund Community Relations Program, such as maintaining consistent contact with citizens to secure their trust and confidence in EPA, are not being met, and will not be met, if EPA staff do not work together to maintain continuity both within the Agency and with the community.

Problems resulting from staff turnover will likely occur if community members are not aware that a staff change has been made or why it has been made. The problems increase if the new staff member is not familiar with the history of the site, past community relations activities at the site, and/or the personal relationship that his or her predecessor had with the community.

Implementation: The SMR offers the following recommendations to Regional Superfund teams to help maintain continuity throughout staff turnover:

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1) Communicate staff changes to the community as soon as possible. Sharing staff changes with the public is without a doubt the most effective way to minimize the problems caused by turnover. EPA should inform the community of staff changes either before they occur or as soon after as possible. The following techniques offer methods to maintain continuity with communities despite inevitable complications caused by geographical constraints, abrupt staff resignations, and lengthy position vacancies.

- Send out notices and/or fact sheets to inform community members of an approaching staff change. If the change is sudden, and advance notice is not possible, send the notices out as soon after the change as possible. If it is not feasible to develop a written notice specifically for the purpose of explaining the staff transition, include the information in the next site mailing that is distributed, regardless of its primary intent.

- Subject to approval by the particular employees involved, include information about why the change is occurring, where the departing employee will be working, and a profile of the new employee including his or her credentials. This is particularly important at sites where the community has requested that an employee be replaced, and then for some unrelated reason, that employee actually leaves the Agency.

- Introduce the new employee to local officials and community leaders who are involved at the site. This provides an opportunity, either by telephone or through direct contact, to respond to questions and concerns they may have about the change.

- "Pass the torch" during a public forum, such as a public meeting, and have the outgoing staff member introduce his or her replacement. Introductions should include a short profile of the new staff member, and the outgoing staff member should give a brief statement about his or her destination. Although this is the most effective way to introduce new staff to the community, a few constraints can make this type of event difficult. For example, often an outgoing employee does not give ample notice to allow time to plan such a meeting, or leaves before the meeting takes place, or the position does not get filled immediately, leaving no one to whom the torch may be passed.

2) Educate new staff about the site's history, the community's involvement and concerns, and the importance of those concerns. Regions should establish a close working relationship between Community Relations Coordinators (CRCs) and Remedial

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Project Managers (RPMs) to ensure that new staff receive community relations information immediately upon their arrival in the Regional office or their assignment to a new site. If, for example, an RPM is new to a site, the CRC should be responsible for welcoming the RPM, handing over detailed site-related information, and briefing them on any community concerns that developed during the tenure of the previous RPM. This should literally happen during the new RPM's first day on the job. Regions also should utilize their experienced senior staff to advise new RPMs and CRCs, and help them to "learn the ropes."

3) Maintain continuity on the site team. If one member of a team leaves, the other should not leave soon, if possible. For example, if the RPM is replaced, the CRC should remain, and vice versa. Management should consider the continuity of the team before reassigning staff. This will help mitigate the problems associated with major personnel changes.

4) Provide communications training to all Superfund staff who deal directly with the public. Provide community relations skills training for new staff members as soon as they come on board to prepare them for community relations activities. If turnover is too frequent to hold training every time a new person comes on board, at least insure that the new person is given a community relations handbook and is briefed about basic community relations skills until he or she can attend a training. If possible, develop an abridged community relations training, or mini-training, to prepare new staff members until they can attend a more formal, comprehensive training.

Conclusion: Frequent staff turnover within the Superfund program can be a detriment to community relations at Superfund sites. The strong, positive rapport EPA strives to build with citizens must not be undermined by poor continuity between Superfund and the public, and within the Superfund staff. By utilizing the simple, yet effective, techniques mentioned above, Regions can minimize the disruption caused by staff turnover.

For more information regarding community relations in Superfund, contact Melissa Shapiro or Jeff Langholz of my staff at FTS 398-8340 and FTS 398-8341, respectively.

cc: Regional Community Relations Coordinators (I-X)