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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

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(Audio trouble – no sound)

16:01:12

A:

G-A-T-E.

Q:

And uh, what was your involvement with Fernald as far as your like sort of title?

A:

Um, I was the chair of the Fernald Citizen's Task Force, which was the SSAB at Fernald, and is now known as the Fernald Citizen's Advisory Board.

16:01:29

Q:

Great um, so first of all if you could give us a little bit of background, um, a little bit about your training and uh, why your training was important to your job at Fernald.

A:

Okay. Um, well, I, I had a job at Fernald as a volunteer, of course, so um, my training as a lawyer, I went to uh, to law school. And uh, at the time that I started working with the task force, I was a Professor of Law at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. Um, so the legal training was useful in lots of uh, little, but almost all indirect sort of ways.

16:02:09

A:

I should say too, I w-, taught and teach environmental law. And so, to the extent that all this is about, the application of environmental law and those kinds of rules and regulations. I was pretty familiar with the general issues, when I started with the task force, though, I got a lot more familiar with the specific issues real fast.

16:02:33

Q:

And how did you get involved with the task force?

A:

Well, the uh, it was really just kind of out of the blue. Um, I had been in Cincinnati since 1987, I guess. Uh, when we moved there, and I took the job at University of Cincinnati. In 1993, uh, I got a call basically that said, from Ula Bingham, who was the person who had been hired by the Department of Energy, to convene this task force. And she asked me if I'd be interested in serving on it.

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16:03:16

A:

Uh, she had wanted a couple of, sort of neutrals, um, looking to academics principally, uh, for that role to kind of be a, perhaps, a moderating influence, on the uh, on this group, which she recognized would be, was dealing with some pretty contentious issues. And she wanted someone who was fairly knowledgeable about the issues generally um, to, to chair it.

16:03:42

A:

So um, she asked me if I would be interested in chairing it, and it just came at a very good time in my career. I had just gotten tenure, so I could, I could be a (laughing) poster child for the freedoms of tenure and try something that uh, that was completely new to me. So um, that's how it happened, I mean it was really just kind of out of the blue.

16:04:07

A:

I had not had really, anything to do with Fernald before. I knew it existed, and I had always thought it was something I ought to be, ought to know more about, so it just seemed like a perfect fit.

16:04:21

A:

And what were some of the general issues that you uh, had to deal with, or what were some o' the things that you had to be knowledgeable about to, to feel comfortable in that position?

Q:

Well, um, certainly, knowing about the site and its issues. Uh, I mean its environmental and cleanup issues. And also getting a better sense of what issues were on the table for the task force to deal with. I mean we were given a slate of four issues. The uh, future use of the site, um, the cleanup levels, how clean is clean, priorities, and I can't believe I'm blanking on the fourth.

16:05:03

A:

Uh, fourth one, it will come to me. But anyway, oh. Whether, where we should be disposing of uh, of waste material, whether on site or off site. So that was the issues, those were the issues we had to deal with and the ones I had to get familiar with.

Q:

Wow. That's a lot (laughs).

16:05:24

A:

Well, it proved to be a lot. And uh, there was ah, fairly um, we, the first phase of our operations was really 18 months to two years. And the first several months of it was a matter of all of us getting up to speed and figuring out what the issues were and how to, how to move forward with 'em.

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Q:

Now you had mentioned it was uh, Department of Energy and uh, Fluor Daniel Fernald, it was kind of their idea to put together a Task Force?

16:05:57

A:

Yes. Well, it, in, its origins were with something called the Federal Facilities Environmental Restoration Dialogue Committee, which is something that uh, U.S. EPA set up to deal with the problem of lack of trust. Um, at all kinds of federal facilities, not just Department of Energy ones, but Department of Defense ones as well.

16:06:19

A:

And that committee came, which was this national thing, uh, came up with the idea of site-specific advisory boards. Um, EPA liked the idea and DOE jumped on it. And it came out just about the time that Tom Grumbly became the assistant secretary for environmental management. And he was very supportive of the idea of public involvement, so this was just a natural thing for him to gravitate to.

16:06:47

A:

And it turned out that the, the key people at the site as well, both in, as it was known then, FERMCO, and at the Department of Energy, as well as the regulators, thought it was a good idea, too. So it just all came together. And really it was really Ken Morgan, who was with D-, still is with DOE, um, who kind of spearheaded the whole, the whole effort um, because he was very enthusiastic about this idea.

16:07:14

A:

So Fernald really got up and running on this very early. It was the first site to really get organized, and we sort of threw out the process of been, well, for most of it, we're kind of one step ahead of everyone else. I don't know if that was good or bad, but it certainly meant that chronologically, we tended to, to be moving quickly.

16:07:37

Q:

Great. And historically why did the public have a mistrust of both DOD sites and DOE sites?

A:

Well, I think um, it was the secrecy. The DOE sites more significantly. A sense of being lied to. "Everything's okay, no problem, don't worry about it." And just the extent of the uh, the problems at these sites. I mean, Fernald, relatively speaking, has uh, is fortunate uh, in the kinds problems that it has. They're not as horrible as they are at lots of other places, both Defense and, and Energy sites.

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16:08:20

A:

So it's a uh, I think that's, it's the secrecy, the assurances that there were no problem. It's those things that gave rise to a real lack of distrust. And those, I mean real lack of trust. Um, and those were present uh, in spades at Fernald.

(Beeping off camera)

16:08:40

Q:

And when you first became the chair of the, what was then the FCAB, or well, now.

A:

No. Is now the FCAB.

(Beeping off camera)

Q:

Is now the FCAB. Was then the Task Force. Um, um, how was that evident in, with some of the public involvement that you had some of the people that you talked to. I mean if you could give me a couple of examples of people who didn't trust the government.

16:09:02

A:

Oh, well, I think the obvious example would be the, the people from FRESH. I mean, I think they had, you know, personally in some cases, been lied to. Um, personally been given assurances that turned out to not be accurate. Um, so I think that they definitely, um, by the t-, by 1993, they were feeling more comfortable with the site management, and with the Department of Energy.

16:09:36

A:

Thanks to um, I think the, the new administration coming in and being committed to public involvement. Um, thanks to having some beginnings of, of ongoing relationships there. I think that it really, 1993 was, was kind of a turning point year anyway. It was when things were beginning to turn around and I think that the Task Force came on the scene at a very, very fortunate moment in the site's history.

16:10:07

A:

When people were beginning to work together, beginning to ah, understand each other uh, a little better. So it was a combination of, of different things coming together at once.

16:10:

Q:

Great, great. And um, you were also part of the Cincinnati Environmental Advisory Council?

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A:
Right.

Q:
Can you tell us a little bit about that organization?

16:10:32

A:
Yeah, that was um, an advisory group for the city of Cincinnati, which of course doesn't include Fernald. Um, and I'd been involved with that for a number of years. It rendered advice on a variety of different topics. Um, it, it did not involve the same kind of intense work on particular tasks that the uh, that the Task Force did. But it was, it was similar in the sense that it was an advisory body that tried at least to be fairly representative of a number of points of view.

16:11:08

Q:
Great. Um, so tell us a little bit about what, what your responsibilities and what the Task Force's responsibilities were um, just daily, day-to-day kinds of things.

A:
Well, okay, I mean, it was, day-to-day, eh, would describe, I guess, (chuckling) my responsibilities as, as we got started. I mean this became a, practically a full-time, or maybe even more than a full-time occupation, for, for that first kind of two-year period, for that first big push. Um, with it. And I was working with a staff made up of a couple of people from the public affairs office of FERMCO/Fluor Daniel Fernald.

16:11:50

A:
Um, and um, and we hired a um, technical advisor, facilitator, we never really had a proper uh, title designation for Doug Sarno, probably because he kind o' did something of all of those different functions. But I, I w-, would be in communication on a, you know, daily basis with, with him and the uh, um, direct staff people at uh, at FERMCO.

16:12:24

A:
And, and then with a variety of people in the uh, at the site, um, for that period up to about July of 1995, when our, our report, our first complete report came out. Um, the Task Force um, met every month for those really two years, or nearly two years.

16:12:46

A:
Um, and astonishingly um, we had no changes in membership um, during that period. I mean, there was a little adjustment towards the beginning of it. No changes in membership, no one dropped off ah, during that period. And attendance at these monthly meetings was incredibly high.

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16:13:08

A:

Um, the commitment that the, that the members of this group showed was really astonishing and when you look at um, some of the experiences at other sites it was even more remarkable. Um, a lot more ah, internal decisiveness, I think that ah, this group just did a great job of being committed to working together coming up with solutions and I think we did it.

Q:

So who else was serving on the Task Force with you?

16:13:43

A:

Oh, well, I'll, I shall refer you to a written roster, otherwise I'm gonna leave someone out. But um, let me, I'll just describe them, I think that would be better. There were about 15 members um, and ah, the 15 public members and then there was a representative from Ohio EPA, US EPA and the Department of Energy who were exofficially members, they didn't vote but they participated fully ah, in our meetings.

16:14:14

A:

Ah, there were people from FRESH, there were ah, representatives of the major labor groups, ah, neighbors of the site, ah, local business people, local educators, um, whom am I forgetting. Um, citizens from the areas, some health professionals, it was a pretty broad range of people.

Q:

Great, yeah.

(Tape stops and begins again)

16:14:45

A:

There's, there's the banging.

Q:

Yeah. She gave them the big green eyes. She's good at that. What was it?

(Cameraman: I don't know, I'm not getting a warning any longer)

16:15:05

Q:

Huh. That's weird okay. That's fine.

(Cameraman: Rolling)

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16:15:14

Q:

Something that I think is interesting about that whole era of time was that they really were in sort of a decision making processing at that whole, and they were bring the public in. Um, now of course a lot of people in the public were saying, hey cleanup isn't really happening yet. I don't see any results, why is that? And ah, can you just address how that was dealt with by the Task Force.

16:15:37

A:

Well I think that the, one of the first things that we have to deal with is that there, the site ah, was divided into five different operable units which is EPAese for different units for cleaning it up. And there was a very elaborate set of decisions or pieces of the decision-making process for each one of those operable units.

16:16:01

A:

So the first thing we needed to do was sort of break that down into a more manageable ah, operating procedure for ourselves. And it turns out that the key issues that we had to deal with really related to um, only a couple of these operable units.

A:

Um, and we could tie ourselves to those schedules which also happened to be later schedules and wrap them into more holistic issues rather than particular numbers for particular pieces of the site. Um, but I think there was a rec-, a clear recognition um, in certainly in the, with the people who are most familiar with the site.

16:16:45

A:

That there was this decision-making process. That the decision-making process was a, was an achievement. I mean, that there was a schedule there. Um, and that process had to be gone through before you would really start cleaning up because you needed to know what you were doing before you started.

16:17:03

A:

Um, at least with the permanent kinds of remedies. So, um, I think there, one of the areas where we kind of stumbled around at first was figuring that issue out. How, how do we coordinate our work with the official decision-making processes. And um, I think we came up with a pretty good schedule that our report, which, you know, I'm sure is in the archives all over the place I hope, is ah, um, it details all of those kinds of how we worked that issue out.

16:17:41

Q:

So it must have been an incredible educational process for you because you had to become familiar with all those different parts of the site and what were the cleanup issues in each one. Can you tell us a little bit about how you went about that discovery.

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A:

Well um, I guess I, and you're right and I think the most important thing that we did was, was education really, which of course given my profession sort of suits, but um, and so I may think of that as more important than other people would. But there were, for one thing the people on this Task Force had a lot, had a wide variety of knowledge about the site.

16:18:24

A:

Um, some people really had a strong overview of it, some people knew a lot of little pieces but didn't have a very good framework to put it in. Um, there was lots of little details and other people were really pretty innocent of, of the whole thing.

16:18:44

A:

And so, um, we had to get everyone up to some basic level of knowledge and that's where having this, or having the technical consultant um, there, that was one of his main jobs. Was taking all of this technical information and turning it into something that was accessible in a, in a fairly rapid form.

16:19:09

A:

Um, and I think that when it, when you come down to it the actually information that you need to make these decisions, at least at the high level that we were making them, is, is less than you might think. In other words the, you know, the senior management of, of the site for example, um, is not, is making decisions on far less information than, than people who are developing the plans, and doing the monitoring and so on.

16:19:38

A:

I mean, that's just the nature of, of decision making, and I think we figured out pretty quickly that, that was the level we needed to be operating at. And so, we, what the, our technical advisor, Doug Sarnio and I did together for that time was um, figured out the kinds of information that would need to be, we needed to develop.

16:20:03

A:

Um, and needed, that needed to teach in a way. Um, and then, then his job was kind of to put that stuff together. And it was that process of gathering information um, that really put us in touch with lots and lots of people at the, sort of operational level at the site. And I think that ended up being one of the great strengths of ah, strengths of it.

16:20:31

A:

Um, you might have heard of this ah, Future Site game that we developed at some point, well that's, that's a nice example. I mean, it's sort of the jazziest example of it with the boards and the pegs or the poker chips and all that.

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16:20:46

A:

Um, and the idea there was we needed something graphic to um, to do a couple of things. First to show, give some sense of what the site was like, but to give some sense of the tradeoffs that needed to be made and what particular decisions about future use meant in terms of moving dirt and moving contamination.

16:21:10

A:

And so, it was a really collaborative effort and we put this, this thing together and it really worked wonderfully well at a couple of different levels. One that I didn't really expect was that it was very good at explaining to people the relationship between the future use of this site and risk levels and how much uranium was there.

16:21:33

A:

And how much had to be dug up, I mean, just those physical relationships which it, it, you know it's all kind of legalistic, bureaucratic language when it comes, when it, when you hear it but it really has some relation to the physical world and that's what we were trying to convey.

16:21:51

A:

And ah, and it worked really well that way, um, the ah, the other thing that it did and this was really unexpected, is that early on, um, in one of the first versions of it we, we did this version and people did this exercise.

16:22:09

A:

And, on one month, and then a week later or something I get this frantic call from, from the people who had given us the data saying, "oh my, we have, we've made an error by a margin of 10 in the data. And we've made it look 10 times worse than it was." That is 10 times more waste material than there was.

16:22:35

A:

So fortunately it was a mistake in the right direction that is not in the direction of making it seem to be less of a problem. But, but there was just huge concern that we had a disaster on our hands that, you know, the mistrust was gonna rear its ugly head again. Um, but I didn't see it that way at all and it didn't work out that way.

16:22:55

A:

Um, I thought it was a great opportunity to teach people about why, or how this information is generated. Um, that is, there is, it's models and there's uncertainties and assumptions and so on and so instead of having this disaster, what happened was first of all it was the people who gave us the information who came and said, "oops, we goofed." Here, here is better information.

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16:23:21

A:

So, that was a, that was a trust-building occurrence in any event, I mean, here they were being flat out very candid with us about what the situation was um, then at the next meeting when we talked about this, they were there of course. They basically came to all of our meetings anyway.

16:23:40

A:

That is, these are the ah, Flu-, Fluor people um, who were doing this modeling, came to our meetings anyway. Um, and a conversation began about how this happened that moved from being um, Doug and me presenting something and people asking us questions, to them kind of turning and asking the people who really knew what the answers were and it got a much broader dialogue.

16:24:08

A:

So, people not only understood this modeling and what this number, these numbers meant, and what the limits were better, but they began to develop relationships with these people who were making the decisions or developing the information that was used in decisions.

16:24:27

A:

And that kind of personal relationship, face-to-face encounters it, you know, if there was apart from the utility of the decisions themselves, if there was one thing that I think that the Task Force really contributed to, it was kind of riding this wave of um, people beginning to get to know each other, trust each other and, and making that happen more.

16:24:52

Q:

Great, and you were also involved in, the Task Force was sort of a model for other sites. And so you got kind of involved in helping other sites um, start these types of task forces or.

A:

Yeah, um, we um, I did that, that a little bit um, the, because we sort of jumped out early and because we really got, got down to business quickly and we did not spend a lot of time on the choosing of people or on rules or procedures and so on. We were really working on substantive issues, very quickly ah, indeed.

16:25:41

A:

And so, um, we started being sort of held up as a model really that wasn't the goal here, but it was certainly flattering. So um, we ah, we ended up getting involved in various ways with, with headquarters because this was, you know, this was working. And it was something that was part, it was an important program for the ah, for the assistant secretary.

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16:26:07

A:

Ah, and so, we got a fair amount of visibility within the complex that way. Um, I would be ah, ribbed a lot at meetings of the chairs of these groups which was when I was doing it a, just a terrific group of people. But I'd get a lot of ribbing about being ya know, the teacher's pet and things like that.

Q:

That's great. Okay. Um, now one thing that came along during your tenure with the Task Force is the Ten Year Plan. That's like a really big still important thing on site. Um, can you tell us a little bit about how that came about? And how the Task Force helped with the Ten Year Plan?

16:26:44

A:

Well, like all good things in the DOE complex, it started at Fernald. Um, I, I, I, I kid you not, I mean the uh, at uh, one of our jobs was to look at priorities. And had all along thought that that would be the last thing we would look at, as it was. Um, but we thought that it would be a matter of sort of looking at the various issues er, and things that needed to be done.

16:27:13

A:

and saying, "this is the most important. This is the next to most important. Or do this first, do this second." And so on. And we were a little bit along the way to doing that. Um, when we were presented by, by DOE or Fluor, I forget who first suggested this, but it something they'd been talking about, with um, an accelerated cleanup plan. I forget if it had a name or not.

16:27:39

A:

But it was for Fernald and basically the idea was to instead of looking at the site in terms of discreet projects with different risks attached. And we'll try to um, deal with it that way, let's look at it as a s-, er, look at the site as a whole and do, do it in the way that would make it move fastest.

16:28:02

A:

Um, and considering we were looking at sort of twenty years or something of cleanup, the idea of having that um, was a benefit in terms of risk to say nothing of money. So um, th-, this was presented to us. We took uh, a long look at it and made some suggestions about it um, here and there.

16:28:23

A:

But basically, instead of um, coming up with a list of priorities, we said, "look, if you can do this faster in a sort of coherent engineering sort of way. That's great. Do it. You have our, our full support for doing it that way." Um, and then when um, Grumbly left and Al _____ became the assistant secretary, um this looked pretty good.

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16:28:49

A:

Because he needed to have a way of showing Congress that there was an end in sight. Which was something that was attractive to us as well. Um, in fact maybe that was the name of it. It was called "an end in site" or something like that. I, I, I think. Anyway, so, he, he didn't call it that, but the uh, that was the uh, it served the needs of the uh, um, Fernald as a whole as well.

16:29:15

A:

I mean, of the complex as a whole. So, uh, it, it got sort of morphed into this, this bigger idea. So, we, the Ten Year Plan was after um, uh, the Task Force issued its major recommendations. But as it came down Fernald, ya know, sort of back from headquarters we were involved in a, ya know in tinkering with it and figuring out um, how, how to implement it and what some of the issues were.

16:29:46

A:

I was involved, personally was involved with the Ten Year Plan a lot but, um, from my position um, on the Environmental Management Advisory Board, which is the national advisory board for it. And I in fact chaired the committee that was deal-, of the board that was dealing with this issue. So I saw a lot (tape end).

TAPE FLHP0233

17:01:08

Q:

Lets talk a little bit about "Danger and Deceit."

A:

Okay.

Q:

The ah, press that we received a lot of the times was unfavorable especially from Mike Gallagher, if you could just give us your impressions of that whole time and what your role was.

17:01:23

A:

Well, my role was thankfully was pretty much non-existent ah, in that. Ah, actually ah, Fernald did get a fair amount of good press I have to say. When these decisions were, the basic decisions were made about accelerating cleanup and trading off the, the balanced approach, trading off, getting rid of the worst stuff, keeping only the, the least dangerous material.

17:01:53

A:

Um, there was a lot of support for that in of the local press so actually I think one of the things that was frustrating in fact about um, the, the Gallagher reports was that it really poisoned the um, well or it poisoned what was a pretty supportive ro-, had become fairly supportive relationship um, between the, you know, the local media and the site.

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17:02:22

A:

Um, well ah, where to begin, it ah, always seemed to me that there was um, a huge amount of hyping here. That he was playing, Gallagher that is and the *Enquirer*, were playing to a really irresponsible ah, extent on, you know, basic fears of radiation.

17:02:48

A:

Uh, and tying everything back to this ah, you know, if it was travel vouchers, they still put the ah, the radiation trefoil on the, on the logo as if, you know, taking an unauthorized flight to Washington, DC was a radiation hazard.

17:03:06

A:

Ah, and um, and some of the, some of the claims were, seemed pretty clearly baseless. Ah, or ah, my favorite was, was the fact that the *Enquirer* is a big fan of cutting red tape and getting rid of paperwork and yet that's what they were criticizing Fluor for on the, on the travel vouchers. Which, you know, escaped their editorial eye I guess.

17:03:36

A:

But um, it was ah, in terms or sort of a truth or non-truth of it as I say, I think that he um, made no distinction at all between ah, between things that were really dangerous and things that weren't really dangerous. And he never really, as far as I could tell, picked up on something that was really dangerous.

17:04:04

A:

Um, and he for a while was being used by ah, people who had some, some issues with the site um, I think for some kind of leverage or whatever. But ah, their, what it started with I think was this complaint of a guy who was a whistleblower or, or something, I was never sure.

17:04:29

A:

And um, the fact that um, that Fluor ultimately settled that case was, was a little unsettling I think to ah, to a lot of us. So I'm not quite sure what to make of that ah, that side of it. But on the safety side, I think he was clearly playing on people's, or automatic and not unreasonable nervousness about ah, about radiation and anything having to do with it um, being a danger.

17:04:59

A:

Um, I think the most impressive thing though about that story and that whole set of stories was how little effect it really had ah, on Fernald's long-term prospects. Um, that is, the, because, what it came out in '96 or something, um, because of this intensive involvement with the community from '92, '93 on, I think that, that what you might call the key stakeholders at Fernald had already pretty much developed a relationship.

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17:05:40

A:

Whether it was good or bad, had already basically developed a relationship and had a pretty firm notion of who DOE was, and who Fluor was um, and what they thought of those people. And it was generally a positive one. Frustrations sometimes, irritations sometimes, but basically a positive one. And I don't think that the story really had much of an effect on that.

17:06:07

A:

Um, I think that the worst effect that it had was that, ah, from '96 to '97 I guess, pretty much the last year or so that I was there, there was, there was a kind of hunkering down and a lot of the openness towards the outside that we had seen from Fluor and from ah, from DOE was, was limited. There was just a general nervousness about the public.

17:06:43

A:

Um, and it wasn't till, it wasn't meant badly and in fact we had um, oh gee I don't even remember. It was probably early '97 I remember having a, having a meeting with the, the FRESH people and me and um, the regulators and DOE senior management.

17:07:03

A:

Um, we called it the "Come to Jesus meeting," where we just really had a very good frank talk about, about this. About how um, the Gallagher report had made the site kind of gun shy and nervous about the outside and that the public was beginning to feel distance again.

17:07:25

A:

Ah, and I think that things improved considerably after that. I think that ah, site people really didn't appreciate the extent to which that had happened and the extent to which it was being noticed and was becoming frustrating.

17:07:39

A:

Ah, and I think things, things sort of got back to normal ah, after that. So I would say that was, that was a very negative effect, but more than anything it was, I mean from my perspective, and as I say I really had nothing to do with it. It was ah, it was annoyance and it was certainly a frustration that, you know, something that you cared about and thought was really going well, was being portrayed as this sort of criminal disaster area. Which I thought was unfair.

17:08:11

Q:

Which is interesting too because, I don't know how you'll react to this, but I talked to a gentleman this morning who said he had worked at Fernald for like 38 years, and uh, you know, he started very early in the 50's.

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17:08:26

Q:

He said to me, “well I was offended when there were dust collector releases in ’84 and all this started coming to the public and everything,” he said he was very offended that the public would look at him as a war monger. (Comment: A war monger!)

17:08:42

Q:

By people that were looking at the atomic bomb plant and saying that the people who worked there were like war mongers. It reminds me of that same public reaction to workers too. Uh, what’s your reaction to sort of the way he felt about it.

17:09:07

A:

Surprise, actually. Uh, I’m surprised that you’d get that reaction in 1984, I guess. I mean I can see it in 1974, but by 1984 that’s a little surprising. Now, being seen as kind of a radioactive person, you know, I don’t want to shake his hand, because he might contaminate me.

17:09:32

A:

That I can see and I have heard some sort of suggestions from people who worked at the plant that they worry about that. Certainly in the Gallagher thing they felt like they were being portrayed as, you know, people who didn’t work, and you know, sort of lazy bums, swilling at the federal trough, uh, kind of thing. I know there was that kind of personal reaction.

17:10:02

A:

Uh, I’m surprised about the comment for another reason. Which was when this started coming out, in general the closest community was very supportive of the site and its mission, and very angry with the people in FRESH and others who were arguing for closing it down and cleaning it up. I mean they really became social pariahs uh, Marv Clawson, who’s one of the members of the Task Force.

17:10:38

A:

I remember him being just incensed when, when someone started talking about how what a horrible thing that this site had done to these local communities. And he’s saying, “this same guy was, wouldn’t speak to me, you know, in the 1980’s because he thought I was messing up a great thing.

17:10:57

A:

And now he won’t speak to me because I’m allowing there to be some waste remaining on the site.” And I, I mean I, I find that well more plausible I guess, that the reaction in 1984 was, was to be very supportive of the site continuing what it was doing. But of course, you know, I don’t know who this person was talking to. So, it’s very interesting, to add to it.

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17:11:32

A:

Uh, at some point I looked, I asked someone to look at the early newspaper clippings about the creation of the Fernald site. And uh, I guess because I'd seen a presentation at Rocky Flats and it opens with this, uh, a picture of the Rocky Mountain News, or whatever it is, that has a huge headline, in little words it says: "Good News Today!"

17:12:00

A:

And then in huge headline it says "A Bomb," or uh "A Plant to be Built at Rocky Flats." And in huge headlines and uh, and this is meant to be sort of ironic, of course, in the context and I wondered if there was something like that at Fernald. And it was interesting. Uh, because the reaction of the local people was very mixed.

17:12:23

A:

I mean, some, the Chamber of Commerce sort of reaction was positive, you know, this is great, we add to GE, you know, this is terrific. Uh, but the people whose land was being taken, or who lived nearby, didn't like the idea at all. And you know, for the early 50's, I thought these people would, you know, just be sort of patriotic and so on.

17:12:45

A:

I was, I was surprised at the, the level of hostility to it. Um, and then some people were well, I, you know, sort of, "I don't like it but that's what has to happen, so." And there's a whole mix of attitudes, even in that immediate area.

17:13:01

Q:

Yeah, I saw that newspaper clipping, it was from 1951.

A:

Yes. Yeah. I thought that was real interesting, and you know, there was a real mixed reaction. And we talked to the Knollmans, uh, both (Comment: Yes, yes) Bill and Carol. And they remained in that article, and Carol was just a little baby then, you know, and so it was, that was kind of interesting.

17:13:17

Q:

Um, something that you mentioned before is kind of shipping issues? And um, uh, NIMBY-ism, Not In My Back Yard kind of stuff. And a lot of people say well, they're glad that the waste is going off site, because it's not gonna be in my backyard any more. And then there're other people who are saying, "well, wait a minute. They're building this big On-Site Disposal Facility." And um, how did you deal with all those reactions of shipping and non-shipping?

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17:13:44

A:

Well, that was one of the main functions of this future site game was to focus people's I-, attention on what it really meant to dig it all up and move it all away. Um, what would be left at the site? Crater. Um, what would happen? How would you get rid of it? It would be trucks and trains, in large numbers. And the fact that it had to go somewhere else. Um, and I think that what the group came to.

17:14:15

A:

And again, I think to it's credit, remarkable credit, was um, to uh, understand that we had to kind of balance these things. And that it didn't make sense to ship everything that needs to be controlled off-site, and we had to make some judgements.

17:14:39

A:

And it turned out very fortunately that there is an inverse relationship between how hazardous, how hazardous it is and how much material there is. So, there was a relatively small amount of material that was extremely hazardous and needed to go somewhere else.

17:15:00

A:

And then a less haz-, and then an enormous volume of stuff that wasn't very hazardous. Um, and interestingly there is not a lot in between. It was some, it was sort of one extreme or the other. And so our recommendation, the one that was accepted, is that you take the worst material, get it off-site, Fernald is not a good place to ah, store that kind of material.

17:15:31

A:

It's wet, it's over an important aquifer et cetera. But the, the really low level hazards, the contaminated soils and so on can be safely put into the disposal facility. I mean, all the modeling that was done, shows that even if the facility is breached, it takes so long, and it gets so diluted by the time it gets the aquifer that it's not a health hazard.

17:15:55

A:

So I think that's, I think we came to just an excellent resolution of it. And I really, that was a courageous thing for, for especially the people right in the community to come to. And I really, I think it's a remarkable conclusion. And frankly I think that it's helped other sites come to similar recognition about it.

17:16:18

A:

Um, you mentioned transportation, I think one of the things that the task force did early on that's proven to be very helpful is um, setting up communications with the recipient sites and we have for a long time now worked very closely with the Nevada Citizen's Advisory Board.

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17:16:39

A:

And, so we've gotten a better perspective of where they're coming from and they've gotten a better perspective of where we're coming from, I mean, their view on this is, it turns out, very reasonable. They understand that Nevada is a better place to have material like this than Fernald, but they don't want to become the world's dumping ground.

17:17:01

A:

They want to have some idea how much there is and, and so on. And it turns out that once you really got down to what each person really needed, there wasn't a conflict. We could work it out. Um, this, the whole problem with the white metal boxes and so on, I mean, that obviously got kind of blown out of proportion.

17:17:21

A:

But I think that one reason it didn't create a huge problem with the stakeholder community on either side was that there was this on-going communication, this on-going relationship um, this clearly, a problem clearly a ah, a goof, but I think that ah, when, when, DOE concluded that there wasn't a real health hazard from it, people actually believed it.

17:17:50

A:

And, you know, get back to trust where we started, I, you know, in 1981 if DOE had said it was safe the automatic reaction would have been it wasn't. Well actually in 1985 I should say, um, the automatic reaction would be it must not be safe, um, I think we've come a long way.

17:18:12

Q:

Terrific, um, something that I wanted to ask you about was ah, what do you feel was the greatest achievement of the task force?

A:

Um, I guess two things um, the first one was - coming up with a coherent blueprint for the site through a stakeholder process. Through involving the public and um, and the regulators and the site working together in a collaborative way coming up with a sensible blueprint for cleaning up. That is gonna get cleanup done at the site within a reasonable period of time and this, this problem is actually gonna get fixed.

17:19:07

A:

Um, and that's terrific. I'm very proud of the Task Force doing that. Um, and the second thing is, is developing just the relationships generally, so that when, you know, danger and deceit or whatever it's name was, ah, comes up or when white metal boxes have problems um, or when vitrification doesn't work there is, we have a way around conflict and we can approach these problems in a sensible way, in a cooperative way, in a way that doesn't hurt relationships, doesn't slow us down.

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17:19:46

A:

But just keeps us moving, and you know, between now and 2006 or whenever it gets finished there's gonna be problems. The silos issue is still unresolved um, and those are gonna be really hard decisions and it's, you know, the fact that people like each other isn't gonna make them easy decisions.

17:20:05

A:

But it means, I think, that we can make them in a responsible way. And I think that the Task Force really helped developed and foster that kind of relationship and I think that's really important.

Q:

Great, great, um, let's talk a little bit about future land use.

(Off camera: can I talk to you for just a minute, they're gonna clear that)

Q:

Just tell 'em to go ahead.

(Tape stops and begins again)

17:20:31

Q:

Two more questions then we're done. Um, _____, is kind of what I'm thinking about right now and ah, you mentioned the whole question of "how clean is clean?" And how was that determined, and ah, what's gonna be done with that? Who is making the determination to what's gonna be happening with that land?

17:20:53

A:

Right, well in terms of future land use for the purpose of making cleanup decisions, um, it was really generic and we made some generic recommendations about what, what should happen at that site. Actually our conclusion on that was negative in the sense we said it shouldn't be indust-, it shouldn't be agricultural and it shouldn't be um, residential.

17:21:17

A:

But pretty much anything else we thought really ought to be, any other more specific decisions ought to be made closer to the time that the site is available. A number of people had a real preference for ah, turning it into green space.

17:21:31

A:

And my sense is that's probably what's gonna happen. Ah, there doesn't seem to be a huge call for that as industrial land um, and, and I think green space could be a real benefit to the community. Ah, the idea of using it for ah, for Native American burials ah, I think is just terrific.

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17:21:55

A:

Ah, it, it does many good things that way. Um, preserves the land and I think gets a real benefit. In fact one of the benefits of this whole thing has been, all the archeology that's been done around the site. And it's gonna be great to have a place where some of that can be ah, can be displayed.

17:22:16

A:

If, if that turns out to be possible. So, um, our future land use recommendations were really that the site just didn't not seem an appropriate place for those really intensive kinds of uses. But it's something that really ought to be decided by the, the kinds of people who would be making these decisions in an event.

17:22:38

A:

That is local planning authorities, local citizens. It really wasn't so much DOE's job ah, to figure out what to do with the site after it's cleaned up. And of course part of the site, the part that is ah, um, that is the disposal facility will always be a disposal facility. You can't do much else with it other than that.

17:23:03

Q:

Great and um, how about the future of the workforce. Did the Task Force have a whole lot to talk about with that?

A:

No, not really. Um, that was ah, that was an issue we actually, pretty much stayed away from ah, to get involved in, you know, these, you know, issues involving collective bargaining agreements and so on was really well beyond our competence. And it just didn't seem appropriate, the workers were well represented in a way that the public generally doesn't, doesn't have that kind of a, that kind of a forum.

17:23:45

A:

They were part of, part of the decision and clearly the idea of cleaning up and accelerating cleanup will have workforce implications. But ah, I think that the ah, the workforce there had, you know, slowly come to the realization that this was not going to reopen as a manufacturing facility.

17:24:10

A:

Um, and once you've made that, you know, you've gotten there then it's a matter of figuring out what's the, or the most ah, most humane way to get done what we need to get done and get out of there. Um, that's a, it's a tough issue and that's one fortunately we didn't really have to deal with directly.

17:24:30

Q:

Great, and um, how do you feel about preserving Fernald history like we're doing right now (laughing)?

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A:

(Laughing) Well it, it ah, when this idea, well the idea of doing something like this um, came up very early when we were brainstorming about specific future uses of the site. Um, and people, you know, had all kinds of ideas about it but we were ah, but one of the ideas was to turn it into a museum.

17:25:01

A:

Of course it turns out every site wants to turn it into a museum of the Cold War but that idea of making it something positive so that future generations will learn about what happened, and ah, learn from our mistakes. That was a ah, that was a definite theme there.

17:25:20

A:

Um, another theme was, was honoring the people who worked there and ah, who had to some extent been put at risk, to a lot of extent put at risk. Um, and that came up early on as well. Um, we didn't really pursue the idea very strongly ah, because we, we weren't looking at specific things to do at the site but really more at environmental decision making. But when this came up as an idea, I mean, it, I think it made sense to everybody.

Q:

Great, is there anything you want to add? Anything that we didn't touch on that you wanted to talk about?

17:25:58

A:

Well, I guess the one thing I, I guess I'd add is that I think Fernald was really lucky in that around 19, 1993 um, it, it had a bunch of people involved with the site in one way or another who were really committed to doing the right thing, whatever that was, but figuring out what the right thing was.

17:26:29

A:

And working cooperatively to get there, um, it's not unique in the, in the weapons complex but it's not common and it really had, from all sides, had people who shared that vision of working together and, and doing, doing right by this, by this site, and the people who lived there and the people who worked there.

17:26:56

A:

Um, and I think it was that, the Task Force for me was really um, a big forum where that happened. Not the only one but maybe the most obvious forum where that really happened. And I think that Fernald was really lucky to have that um, that collection of people there at that time. And I certainly feel incredibly lucky to have sort of showed up on the scene pretty much by accident at that time to be ah, to be part of it.

Q:

Great, is there anything else?

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A:
That's it.

Q:
Thanks so much.

A:
My pleasure.

Q:
Do you want to get nat sound? I mean with that going (background noise). Should we get nat sound with that going or?

(Cameraman: get this for today)

Q:
Okay, all right we're gonna, we're gonna shoot some nat sound off so you can just stay in your chair for just about 30 seconds.