

Some Reasons for Success in Cleanup and Restoration at the DOE Fernald Site

Early Involvement of Community and Stakeholders- Although most cleanup processes like CERCLA (Superfund) require the public to be involved in the project, the reality is that the decision making process is fairly well along before that required involvement occurs. It is better to bring in the community early during the investigation portion of the project. This allows them to become familiar with the project and increases the chance for better working relationships to develop over the life of the project. Early involvement of the public can be a real problem for regulators who are often not allowed to share draft documents. At Fernald the FRESH group asked for and received copies of documents at the same time as regulators.

Frequent meetings- Although many participants would have preferred to be home with their families, many meetings were held to discuss important issues related to the Fernald investigations and cleanup. We learned that it was best to have information meetings well ahead of a decision deadline. Many of these meetings dealt with the technologies used at Fernald. A significant side benefit to these meetings was that everyone got to know each other and respect developed.

Development of improved working relationships between DOE, regulators and the Public/Stakeholders- In 1984/85, when Fernald went public, relationships were very difficult. Uncertainty, lawsuits, health concerns, media coverage and congressional hearings drove and limited communication. It took several years for lawsuits to settle and improved working relationships began to develop between DOE, contractors and regulators. A major effort then began to really involve the community in the process. Early efforts were rough, but slowly relationships began to improve. DOE and contractors brought in new managers who were less tied to the past and were more focused on investigating and cleaning up the site.

Single Cleanup Mission- Before production ended unofficially in 1989 and then officially in 1991, there were significant issues concerning potential conflicts between cleanup investigations and the ongoing production mission. After production ended it became easier for all parties to focus on the single investigation and cleanup mission. DOE recognized this fact when Fernald was one of the first sites to be placed into EM.

Establishment of the Fernald Citizens Task Force- In the early 1990's site investigations were moving forward but DOE realized that they needed answers to some very important questions if the cleanup was to proceed. These were:

What is the future use(s) of the site?

What are the cleanup levels for contaminants of concern for those future uses (How clean is clean")?

What are the best options for waste disposal (all onsite, all offsite, or some mix of these)?

DOE used an agreed upon convener to establish the Fernald Citizens Task Force which was charged with coming up with recommendations on these questions. They also hired

an impartial facilitator to lead this process. The dialogue that followed resulted in recommendations on these questions and continued to build the trust between all parties, including the larger community around Fernald.

Ten-Year Cleanup Plan and closure site- DOE named Rocky Flats, Mound, and the Fernald closure sites in the mid 1990's (we are still searching for the exact date). This set the mission to proceed with cleanup to get these sites "off the books". At the same time the concept of a Ten Year Plan was developed where Fernald would receive a level of funding each year to complete cleanup in ten years. This was one of the first efforts to deal with the ongoing "hotel costs" at DOE sites where significant funds are spent each year whether cleanup is occurring or not. This plan received support from many sectors including Congress and the community.

The Envoy Program- The Envoy Program was established by Fluor Fernald in 1994 after they became the main contractor at Fernald. The intent was to open communications with stakeholder organizations by using workers who were not part of upper level management. Envoys were assigned organizations and were expected to attend regular meetings. At these meetings the envoy would give an update on Fernald activities, future plans and answer questions. This program had the effect of addressing local fears and quietly building support.

Education, Education, and Education- A key factor in Fernald's success was that all parties (DOE, contractors, regulators, and community) were educated throughout the process. No one party finally convinced the others that they had all the answers. Instead, everyone contributed to the final decisions and everyone could see their involvement in the decisions that were finally implemented. Because everyone was a part of the process early, they were able to make tough choices that sometimes compromised their original opinions.

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