



Benefits of Public Involvement for Custodial Departments

How involving stakeholders can improve contaminated site management

Background

The responsibilities for a custodial department dealing with a contaminated site are complex and challenging. The assessment and remediation of a contaminated site goes beyond simply removing harmful agents. It requires involving stakeholders who have significant concerns about the health and safety of their families and communities. If not addressed appropriately, these concerns can create an environment of distrust and frustration which can delay an assessment process or a remediation strategy. Implementing meaningful public involvement strategies through all stages of site identification, assessment and clean up can help to develop stakeholder trust in these processes, and most importantly, stakeholder support for remediation plans.

Stakeholders want effective mechanisms to ensure that they are appropriately informed, that their views are heard and that they have opportunities to influence decisions that affect them. This is particularly true in a contaminated site assessment and clean up, where the actions and decisions taken by custodial departments have a real impact on the people living and working near the site and on their ability to manage their health. This means that custodial departments must recognize that public involvement starts from the moment a site has been identified and continues through site investigation, risk assessment, risk management and remediation phases.

There are many levels of public involvement, each representing a different degree of public interaction with a custodial department. As the degree of interaction increases, the degree of stakeholder influence also grows. Each site identification, assessment and clean up phase offers many different opportunities to involve stakeholders.

The Contaminated Sites Division's team of Public Involvement Specialists is available to provide advice to custodial departments. We are committed to supporting you in your public involvement endeavors. Give us a call.

Ontario/Capital Region	
Brenda Pichette	613-952-9349
Atlantic Region	
Rosanne LeBlanc	902-426-5397
Quebec	
Frédéric Valcin	450-646-1353
Alberta and NWT	
Tannis Topolnisky	780-495-4850
BC and Yukon	
Sharon McCarthy	604-666-5714

Degrees of Public Involvement

Information-sharing: Factual information is needed to describe a policy, program or process. A decision has already been made, and there is no opportunity to influence the outcome.

Gather Information: Information is needed on general views, perspectives, opinions and concerns. There may not be a firm commitment to do anything with the information collected.

Consulting: Generally a two-way information exchange. Individuals and groups have an interest in the issue and will likely be affected by the outcome. There is an opportunity to influence the final outcome.

Engaging: Stakeholders begin to develop an ongoing relationship with the department. Stakeholders are involved in both defining the issues and the process used to address them.

Partnering: Government delegates authority for decision-making to other groups, shares decision-making powers, or manages jointly, with potential legal ramifications being shared with or sole responsibility of other groups.

What are the Benefits of Public Involvement?

There are significant benefits to creating meaningful public involvement processes:

- **Increased stakeholder trust** in the custodial department's ability to manage the process effectively
- **Increase stakeholder understanding** of site identification, assessment and remediation processes, and stakeholder capacity to participate meaningfully in these processes
- **Improve departmental decision-making** by incorporating stakeholder advice and knowledge into design and management of the project
- **Enhance credibility** of the project by developing shared ownership and support for remediation plans
- **Avoid conflicts** by identifying and addressing critical stakeholder issues early in the process
- Ensure nature and scope of public involvement **reflects legal obligations**
- **Develop mutual understanding and improve stakeholder relationships** so that long-standing disagreements can be addressed
- **Create real and lasting change** by designing and implementing a process that addresses community priorities in a meaningful way
- Help the people of Canada **maintain and improve their health**

More Information

Contaminated Sites Division

5th Floor, 269 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9
e-mail: cs-sc@hc-sc.gc.ca

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