

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SITE-SPECIFIC ADVISORY BOARD

Hanford Idaho Nevada Northern New Mexico
Oak Ridge Paducah Portsmouth Savannah River

October XX, 2021

Mr. William “Ike” White
Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management (EM)
U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. White:

On October XX, 2021, the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the EM Site-Specific Advisory Board (SSAB) passed the following recommendation concerning community engagement at EM sites. This recommendation was subsequently approved by XXXX local boards of the EM SSAB.

Background

The EM SSAB understands that successful completion of the DOE-EM mission must include a significant community, public and stakeholder outreach. While DOE-EM has been engaging in public outreach from the beginning we believe that the effectiveness can be improved by any of several different approaches described in this document taking into consideration the complexity and uniqueness of each of the cleanup sites managed by DOE-EM.

Because of the challenges represented by the complexity and variety of sites with correspondingly different cleanup schedules, we are presenting a suite of potential activities that can be implemented by DOE EM and the SSABs at each of the sites but are applicable to all sites in some form. Individual site-specific advisory boards are in the perfect position to help develop and recommend implementation strategies because of our inherent connections within our respective communities. Advisory board involvement on DOE EM outreach would help by providing advice related to specific targeted areas based on feedback from actual communities and individuals who live near or are potentially impacted by site activities.

Below are observations from the SSABs developed during public outreach committee meetings. These are followed by specific recommendations from this committee.

Observations:

- Some SSABs feel that the relationship between DOE and their communities is top-notch,

while others feel that the public stakeholders need greater involvement in the cleanup conversation as decisions are being made.

- SSABs tend to agree that DOE sites are most successful when they host and encourage frank, transparent conversations with the public and regulators regarding the decisions that are being made and the challenges they face. These are often difficult and complex topics that the public is eager to understand and need to have the opportunity to ask questions and see their concerns addressed.
- Sites are most successful when they get in the “trust zone” with their local and regional stakeholders and partners.
- Frequent sharing of information about cleanup, schedules, and funding with local Chambers of Commerce and economic development organizations as well as city and county governments has been found to be very advantageous for one SSAB.
- Public involvement in shaping decisions is important to project success. In order to accomplish this overarching goal, several areas of the public involvement relationship could be improved. What is legally required is just the start.
- Public stakeholders appreciate when we see their values reflected in the activities, agreements, and products of site managers and regulators. Examples include DOE’s solicitation of board values and incorporation of those values in Federal Facility Agreement Public Involvement Plans, soliciting and incorporating board input on informational materials and effective public meeting designs.
- In-depth informational outreach is highly valued by the different SSABs.
 - This can take the form of monthly newsletters for those who can’t attend meetings, to virtual meetings that give the public access to SMEs on specific topics of interest, to regional in-person “dialogues” that promote a two-way communication between interested stakeholders and site managers from both DOE and the regulatory agencies.
 - Access to information digitally and in an approachable format are also highly valued in order to reach and inform the widest audience.
- Beyond virtual access, the ability to take in-person tours is deemed fundamental to the openness and transparency the public is seeking.
- In general, the SSAB boards are interested and willing to consult with DOE on how meetings and outreach materials are designed and distributed, and we encourage DOE to make use of this resource. New media such as videos, animations, virtual tours, regular newsletters, and digital histories are excellent tools for site outreach and education, and their continued development should be supported.
- Many sites like Paducah have a book on the history of the site.
 - These could be placed in the community, university, and local school libraries, city and county offices, tourism, and Chambers of Commerce offices.
 - These could also be presented to state and federal officials, Congressional delegation, state legislators and others.
- Exhibits on the history of the site and cleanup process placed in appropriate locations, such as area universities and colleges, city and county offices; public meetings regarding the site and cleanup and other appropriate locations.

Recommendation

We recommend that the individual site managers/designees and their advisory boards work

together to discuss and determine which activities best suit their circumstances and respond to public needs. The detail, depth, and implementation plan should result from this collaborative effort. The following thematic areas of improvement were agreed upon by the Chair Public Outreach Committee and are offered as recommendations to DOE EM, as well as some specific recommendations within each thematic area. Site-by-site recommendations may be found in the attachments to this letter.

1. Develop an optimal design and platform for virtual and hybrid meetings and make the most of virtual opportunities. Not only does this allow us to make the most of the change that COVID-19 brought to the world but allows access by members of the public that might not be able to travel to SSAB meetings.
 - Utilize social media to quickly disseminate important information to the public, State and local governments, and stakeholders.
2. Maintain efforts for in-person outreach.
 - Make site tours for board members a requisite, and include the public, stakeholder groups, and the media whenever possible.
 - Utilize local museums to house displays for preserving site history or virtual museums to tell the story of the site using online format that can be accessed at any time.
3. Outreach should be a mechanism for effective two-way communication between DOE-EM and the general public. DOE-EM outreach should seek to increase (1) the general public's awareness and understanding of DOE-EM activities as well as (2) actionable feedback from the general public regarding past, current, and future DOE-EM activities.
 - Engage the public early and often. Have interactive conversations with the public that allow the public to ask questions and get answers about complex subjects.
 - Share how public input has shaped or influenced cleanup decisions.
 - Ensure open and transparent decision making.
 - Promote success and planning ahead by incorporating and educating the public on strategic vision plans that cover at least the next 10 years.
4. Continue to support and improve informational outreach products to engage the public.
 - Utilize existing digital media outlets (i.e., YouTube channels, papers, blogs, and newsletters) to broadcast timely information about current events and upcoming activities at a site. [NOTE: Nevada has their own YouTube channel.]
 - Create videos, animations, and diagrams to use at public presentations or posted on websites to present engaging content the public would be interested in.
 - Create a listing of historical articles and books relevant to each site that could be accessed through each site's website. Consider providing hyperlinks for the public to view these documents. EM sites provide databases or libraries of the technical reports produced for EM cleanup actions. The aforementioned historical articles and books would not duplicate the EM libraries but rather provide information that is less scientifically complex and technical for interested but perhaps less informed members of the public.
 - Messaging regarding the cleanup of environmental impacts from nuclear development and research at the sites should be prioritized and increased relative to other, non-cleanup messaging.

5. Continue seeking ways to support and improve the impact of DOE's Site Specific Advisory Boards
 - Educate/inform the public, stakeholders, local and state officials and other appropriate entities on the purpose and responsibilities of the SSAB/CAB Boards in each community, including the current leadership and membership, through news releases, speaker presentations, social media, newsletters and other communication methods. When new leadership has been selected or new members have joined the Board, also announce the changes using similar methods as previously mentioned.
 - When DOE/EM officials visit EM sites, plan an opportunity to visit informally with local SSAB / CAB Board members in order to develop a relationship with its membership and to show that they are valued.
6. Facilitate and support cross-site sharing of activities and public outreach resources. Outreach efforts should be informed and motivated by relevant professional expertise and related quantitative and qualitative metrics. To ensure ongoing progress, outreach efforts should be reviewed periodically by recognized experts in the field of government public outreach, and the outreach efforts should be adjusted as appropriate.

Additional Information

In preparation for this recommendation, the EM SSAB prepared the following three attachments that it believes represents viable activities and opportunities for effective public outreach that EM sites should consider in preparing public outreach plans.

- Attachment #1, *Outreach Activities for DOE EM, contractor, or SSAB*, is a compilation of outreach activities that have been used by SSABs with varying degrees of success. This can be used to develop approaches at Sites.
- Attachment #2, *Improvement Opportunities*, collates public outreach best practices submitted by the SSAB chairs at the Spring 2021 Virtual Chairs Meeting.
- Attachment #3, *Charge Responses Compiled*, contains the PowerPoint slides provided by each SSAB Chair at the Spring 2021 Virtual Chairs Meeting. The slides provide a detailed listing of the improvement opportunities offered by each of the SSAB chairs.

These observations and recommendations are respectfully submitted by the below signed chairs of the respective SSABs.

XXXXXXX, Chair
Hanford Advisory Board

XXXXXXX, Chair
Nevada SSAB

XXXXXX, Chair
Oak Ridge SSAB

XXXXXXXXX, Chair
Paducah CAB

XXXXXXXXX, Chair
Savannah River Site CAB

XXXXXXXXX, Chair
Northern New Mexico
CAB

XXXXXXX, Chair
Portsmouth SSAB

XXXXXXXXXX, Chair
Idaho Cleanup Project CAB

cc: Kelly Snyder, EM-4.32

References

1. Attachment #1, *Outreach Activities for DOE EM, contractor, or SSAB*
2. Attachment #2, *Improvement Opportunities*
3. Attachment #3, *Charge Responses Compiled*