

TACKLING DOE SITE FUTURE USE THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Jeff Wagner
Fluor Fernald Inc.
USA
e-mail: jeffrey_wagner@fernald.gov
513-648-4898

Co-Author: Julie Doering
Fluor Fernald Inc.
USA
513-648-4069
e-mail: julie_doering@fernald.gov

ABSTRACT

As former Department of Energy (DOE) production facilities struggle with the challenges of cleaning up waste generated during 50 years of production, most sites have not seriously looked at the issue of future use. How will the land and physical property that once served the DOE so well during the Cold War be used once cleanup has been achieved? How do you start to answer Future Use questions; and who needs to be at the proverbial decision making table so stakeholders are satisfied when DOE, contractors and regulators walk away from a project? Future Use raises nearly as many questions and issues as those faced during the public involvement processes leading to cleanup. Fortunately, the environment in which these decisions are made can be significantly less charged if managed correctly. It is also possible to gain consensus on Future Use issues if the right parties are pulled together at the beginning of the process instead of receiving a cursory review at the end.

To successfully tackle the issue of Future Use you must:

- Start early.** It takes a long time to remediate a former weapons site, but stakeholders will have the remnants of your plant in their back yard much longer than it took to build, operate and tear-down a site.
- Get management support.** Stakeholders need to know that DOE and contractor management will take their suggestions seriously. Management and regulators also need to play an active role in the process, in setting the ground rules for future use.
- Attract diverse stakeholders.** The issues of future use and access should attract a wider audience than those following the cleanup. It helps to reenergize the process with some new and diverse opinions.
- Use those tools.** This is the time to exercise the communication mediums at your disposal as well as the networks you've established within the community. The ability to pull the right people together and chart a mutually agreed upon path forward may be the legacy remembered

long after the site's production mission and cleanup have been forgotten.

-Don't stop. Once stakeholders and site management agree on the parameters of future use, those drivers should be executed in conjunction with cleanup. When both efforts are coordinated, they will benefit from each other.

A number of large DOE sites have successfully engaged the public in the decision-making process as it applies to site cleanup. Some sites like Fernald, Rocky Flats and Hanford are now actively engaged in cleanup. For some, this work will be completed this decade. At first glance it is easy to shy away from the subject of future use because some may liken it to the early days of public involvement when angry stakeholders demanded to know how the soil, water and air had been contaminated by the production of nuclear weapons. The first meetings held with neighbors to discuss the sites impact on the surrounding community were long, ugly and intense. Angry stakeholders, disenchanted workers and televisions cameras were the staples of the original meetings. Times have changed. The DOE and their contractors have learned to involve the public. The notion of cleaning a site and walking away is not palatable because stakeholders have rightfully come to expect more from DOE.

So when do you start to talk about life after cleanup? Right now. Why not? This should be a good news story for every Public Affairs department across the country. You are taking a snapshot in time to a date when your cleanup mission is complete. A time that is well beyond the daily headaches associated with demolishing, digging, pumping and shipping waste. This is a relatively blank canvas with opportunity for all stakeholders to pick up a brush. The only way you can go wrong is to try to shortcut the public involvement process that you put together for cleanup. Start early. This is an excellent issue for Environmental Management Site Specific Advisory Boards to tackle once major cleanup decisions have been addressed.

Management needs to clearly support and foster efforts involving Future Use. Each site Public Affairs office should be tasked with coordinating this effort. In most cases advisory boards, in conjunction with other stakeholders groups, should lead the process. Again, these are leaders of the community whose opinions are respected and these are folks that are going to be here long after the site is returned to the community.

DOE must be very clear on their guidance. They should communicate to new stakeholders some of the decisions made years before. For example, it is widely known that Fernald stakeholders, including the Fernald Citizen Advisory Board, are adamantly opposed to the site being made available for residential or agricultural use following cleanup. This viewpoint is well documented and has been agreed to by regulators and DOE. Some people, new to this arena might not be as in tune with the public desires. So, everyone needs to know the fundamental ground rules before you ask anyone to think outside the box.

After years of public involvement and hundreds of meetings advising stakeholders on the status of projects, it is easy for our neighbors to drift away from the process. By actively seeking and engaging

new stakeholders, we can add fresh ideas and discussion to the process. We have seen Native American groups show great interest in Fernald since it is federally owned and protected land. They would like to see a portion of the land set aside as a burial place for hundreds of Native American remains currently without a final resting place. Until this issue arose, this group did not weigh in on Fernald cleanup issues. Local schools, sports organizations and clubs may also have an interest in undeveloped land and how it might be used for the betterment of their cause.

How do you get these folks involved? Use every communications vehicle currently in your program. If you have a speakers bureau or envoy program, use each speaking engagement as an opportunity to invite participation. Seek out the groups you think will have an interest. Make some phone calls. Talk to opinion leaders. Talk to elected officials. Use your Web site. This is a great opportunity to exercise the network that your program has built over the past few years. Also, rely on some of the standard means of communication including meeting announcements in the paper. Actively pitch the story to local radio and television stations. Again, remember this is a new and final chapter in the long story of your site cleanup. Hopefully news producers will look at this as a new angle on an old story. Use technology to bring in new participants. Folks from out-of-state or students away at college might be interested in the subject but unable to attend the meetings. If you set up a chat room during your public meetings or workshops, include any support material electronically for folks to reference. Those on the Internet can provide meaningful feedback and will be grateful for the opportunity to participate if you make the same resources available to them as those attending the meeting.

The most powerful tool the DOE and cleanup contractors have in their favor is progress. There is nothing like seeing concrete pads where manufacturing plants once stood to drive home the fact that changes are underway. As managers, we must build upon the momentum and merge plans for future use with plans for cleanup. If a DOE site is closed and then work begins on shaping its future, this work is too late. By merging cleanup plans with final plans for a site, the public will begin to visualize the final look while work is still underway. The end result is that you will see continued support for cleanup while seeing even more enthusiastic support for post cleanup. To delay this process is to lose momentum and to alienate or anger the public when plans have to be rushed at the 11th hour. By running a parallel program you can also actively engage regulators, educators, students and others to come out and study the early results of newly created habitat areas, wetlands, etc. This can be a great learning lab for everyone involved. Plus, by restoring areas early, you have the opportunity to tweak plans that aren't working the way they were anticipated. Slight corrections at this stage are much easier and less expensive to make than those pursued all at once and late in the program.

Where do we stand at Fernald? Fluor Fernald now has a closure contract that extends through December 2010. Fluor Fernald and DOE are reworking the baseline to optimize budget and schedule so the project can be brought to closure safely and ahead of schedule. With this in mind our environmental management and technology folks are refocusing their energies on sequencing activities to find quicker, more effective means to get to the final end state. What still needs to be decided? The public has some strong views when it comes to public use of and access to the site. In addition to a final

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resting place for Native Americans, the remediated land should serve the information needs of area residents and local educators. Above all, the property will be left in a state that protects the environment and the public from the waste buried on-site. The DOE is committed to leaving a site in which the environment is protected. But which agency will maintain the site once cleanup and restoration are complete? Who will pay for the addition of a learning center or other facilities desired by the public? These are good questions and they are still questions we need to answer.

Deciding the future use of a site can and should be a win-win proposition on the part of DOE and stakeholders. There will be some differences of opinion, but stakeholder groups engaged in public participation can come to a consensus. By actively engaging the public and addressing these issues early, site managers will find that neighbors, regulators and local elected officials will be more likely to not only support the site in future use, but also look more favorably upon the work leading up to that point.

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