

## **HOW TO WRITE AN LTES PLAN: ASK THE COMMUNITY**

Joe Estrada, Tami Moore, Department of Energy Office of Kirtland Site Operations, PO Box 5400, Albuquerque, NM 87185-5400

Richard E. Fate, R. William Keener, Sandia National Laboratories, PO Box 5800, Albuquerque, NM 87185-1089

### **ABSTRACT**

The Department of Energy's Office of Kirtland Site Operations (DOE/OKSO) and Sandia National Laboratories developed the first draft of its Long-Term Environmental Stewardship (LTES) Plan during the months from May 2000 to fall 2001.

With the participation of regulators, environmental personnel at the labs, and a spectrum of interested citizens, the draft plan was actually guided by three task group-generated documents.

The paper outlines the chronology of the effort to arrive at a first draft, details some of the issues involving LTES and provides some lessons learned as to the process of involving the community in such an effort.

### **INTRODUCTION**

On August 29, 2001, representatives from the Department of Energy's Office of Kirtland Site Operations (DOE/OKSO) and Sandia National Laboratories presented the first draft of the Labs' Long-Term Environmental Stewardship (LTES) plan to the public. The plan met with mixed reaction from the public and regulators. Some praised the effort. Others criticized it. It is clear that much work remains to be done as the Sandia Environmental Restoration (ER) Project moves toward closure during the next few years.

This paper is a generally chronological account of how Sandia National Laboratories and DOE/OKSO worked with the Albuquerque, New Mexico, community to write the first draft of the Sandia LTES plan. It concludes with some of the lessons learned along the way.

### **SETTING OUT**

Considered a "small" site by the standards of the DOE complex, Sandia launched its ER Project in the early 1990s and today has cleaned up or progressed toward the closure of more than 90 percent of the 203 environmental sites originally identified. Major efforts are under way to complete most of the remaining work on two large landfills and other projects. Cleanup of the last of the sites and project closure are presently targeted for 2008.

The first step in our process was actually looking ahead to see stewardship coming down the road at us. This happened as a result of efforts by Dick Fate and Warren Cox, both managers in the Sandia ER Project. Dick wrote a closure plan for Sandia and began to read the variety of stewardship documentation that was being published in 1998, 1999, and 2000 by DOE and other sources. Dick and his team knew going into this process that the guidance from DOE Headquarters was likely to change as time progressed. In association with DOE/OKSO, Dick created an outline using categories he gleaned from a reading of existing literature on stewardship. The decision was to formulate an outline and use this approach for the initial plan. It proved very helpful for participants to have something to organize their thoughts around.

Before we took our approach to the community, however, we made another stop. We presented our ideas to senior managers at Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratory and to the New Mexico Environment Department's Management Implementation Group. We felt support of this group at the outset was key to project success.

## **GOING PUBLIC**

Next, the team took the outline and proposed schedule for writing a plan to the community. The outline was presented to a number of groups including an audience of about 50 citizens and stakeholders from around the Albuquerque area at a kick-off for our LTES initiative on May 4, 2000.

The categories in the outline essentially became the chapters in our draft plan, with many appendices, tables, charts, photos, and references in support. A "management" category was added to cover the important issues involved in staffing and funding a stewardship effort. This outline became the "bones" of our LTES effort over the next eighteen months.

To understand this step better, some explanation of the role of the DOE Site-Specific Advisory Board (SSAB) at Sandia is needed. The DOE/Sandia SSAB was similar to those formed by DOE at a number of sites around the country to advise DOE on environmental management issues. However, as the level of environmental restoration activities at Sandia began to decline the scope and the nature of the Board needed to reflect these changes also. Thus, in October 2000, the SSAB evolved into a new form, represented locally through the establishment of a Community Resources Information Office.

When we started the LTES plan process, we envisioned using "ad hoc" working groups, or task groups, to help us with the plan, rather than bringing it to the SSAB, as we would have under the earlier paradigm. It turned out that the Board had proposed a similar approach and many of the SSAB members continued to help us by working with the various task groups.

Sandia and DOE acknowledged the early work of the SSAB on stewardship at our kick-off meeting. Throughout the planning process, we continued to point out the valuable contributions that had been made by the Board.

## **BROADENING PARTICIPATION**

One goal of the new approach was to extend public participation to a broader group according to issues that individuals might be interested in. With the LTES effort, we got some new members in our task groups including stakeholders from the local Air Force base, the city, county and state. Our new participants and the former SSAB members who continued to help brought an interesting combination to the process and helped create some new ideas for the plan.

We also emphasized from the first meeting on May 4, 2000, that the public would actually drive the time line and that we would need to be flexible. It proved to be a valuable thing for us to say up front, because we did need to extend the timeline for this process.

We planned our first general meeting on stewardship very carefully. We mailed invitations to over 800 stakeholders. We put display ads in small and large local papers, including El Hispano, a Spanish-language weekly. We advertised on the local public radio station. In addition, we invited Lorene Sigal of the Oak Ridge Citizens Advisory Board to attend as a guest speaker to discuss the concept of stewardship and some of the ground plowed by Oak Ridge early in the process.

We also made some time at this kick-off meeting and at every major meeting in the process for small group discussions. This is what truly made our process tick. Small groups provided all participants an opportunity to ask questions and be heard in a less threatening environment than that of a large public meeting. It gave Sandia and DOE hosts the opportunity to hear public ideas and concerns and better understand them. It also "humanized" the DOE and Sandia representatives by allowing person-to-person dialogue, rather than just formal speech-making. Ideas from the small groups were returned for consideration by all meeting participants through various "report-back" mechanisms. It was important for the broader community group to know the big picture, but the discussions on the details were very valuable to Sandia and DOE in writing the draft plan.

Part of planning for Stewardship should include the expectation that you will be faced with those who are opposed the Stewardship concept. At our second community-wide meeting in August 2000, we attracted a crowd of about 50 protestors who wanted to "just say no" to Stewardship. In fact, they were particularly interested in a single site - Sandia's Mixed Waste Landfill. And, even though our facilitator invited them to join the process and form a "no stewardship" task group, most chose not to participate.

This quote gives you a flavor of the opposition's viewpoint.

**"The DOE doesn't want to spend the money required to cleanup all of the waste that they have created from the nuclear weapons development and testing. Instead what they want to do is put fences around things and put signs up. And, signs and fences are inadequate."**

## **NITTY GRITTY DETAILS**

Despite this colorful diversion, most of those interested in stewardship were more than willing to be a part of the solution to perceived LTES problems. From the formal meetings, three task groups were formed:

- the Long-Term Environmental Stewardship Management Task Group,
- the Institutional Controls and Information Management Task Group,
- and the Site and Environmental Monitoring Task Group.

Each of the task groups met at least monthly to learn about various aspects of environmental stewardship, discuss their values, and to draft recommendations. Membership in these groups included Sandia and DOE representatives, regulators from both city and state environmental and land-related organizations, and an assortment of interested citizens.

Although the original request was for only a 3-5 page report from each group, it soon became obvious that they would be providing much more than that. In the end, each of the reports was in the 30-page range and together they provided a fine guideline for those who would be drafting Sandia's plan.

While the task groups were meeting, Sandia also developed an LTES web site on the Labs' external web. The site included information about upcoming task group and general LTES meetings. It also contained contact information and other information relevant to LTES. Because Sandia's Mixed Waste Landfill was seen as a key site for LTES, information on this particular site was posted on the web, as an example of a site-specific LTES plan. The site now hosts the draft LTES plan and it will continue to be used for LTES activities in the future.

Throughout the process of holding general and task group meetings on LTES, we were careful to help our citizens and other stakeholders try to keep the pieces of the stewardship puzzle in perspective. We wanted them to see the forest as well as the individual trees. To help with this, just prior to our last general meeting -- a meeting when the citizens presented their recommendations to the public -- we hosted an informal workshop. This came to be known as the convergence meeting, because a number of issues that came up in more than one of the task groups were identified and spelled out at this shirt-sleeve session.

Here are some of these points of convergence ranked in order of importance from our workshop:

- ◆ Refreshing/Flexibility -- this reflects the concept of continually revisiting the plan to ask questions, such as is it adequate? Is it up to date? Do we still need it? It is the most effective answer we have right now to the ongoing question of how LTES can address the "long-term" aspect of stewardship.
- ◆ Our task group members combined outreach and public involvement. That is they believe the community must be actively engaged through educational efforts and participation in the LTES process.
- ◆ Another overarching value that was reflected in the Points of Convergence is the concept of "funding for as long as it takes." This continues to be a major concern of citizens who are wary of government's changing spending priorities.
- ◆ Roles and responsibilities of all parties should be spelled out as clearly as possible. This is important at a place like Sandia, which is located on an Air Force Base. We have started to address this need for interagency cooperation through a special Kirtland Federal Complex working group, which has met several times to begin to understand the issues involved in Sandia's LTES plan.

## **PUBLIC REACTION**

It probably won't surprise the reader to learn that the Sandia and DOE plan writers couldn't address each and every concern posed by our community in the first version of our draft plan. But, it certainly surprised some of our citizens and stakeholders.

Our approach was to address those issues we could address and to note those we could not by creating issue boxes within the text of our draft plan. Within each issue box, we attempted to explain the specific issue and suggest who the key players might be in resolving it. And we reminded our stakeholders that as we progress through project closure we would continue to work on these issues. In the next iteration of our plan, we expect more of the issues to be resolved and more detail to be available.

At our meeting in August 2001 to unveil our plan, public reaction was mixed. Some citizens indicated that they expected more of their recommendations to be directly captured in the Sandia plan. Particular concern was expressed over our lack of detail on how we would conduct public participation in the future.

Because of these mixed reviews at our formal unveiling, representatives from DOE/OKSO and Sandia's ER Project decided to meet again informally with members of the three task groups. We hosted an outdoor pizza party at our Community Resources

Information Office and used the meeting as an opportunity to have a very open and frank discussion about the draft plan.

Some of the suggestions from that meeting were:

- ◆ Select several key LTES issues, form working groups, and begin to work out more detail to be ultimately placed in the plan.
- ◆ Work to create a new version of the draft plan within the next two years, depending on the discussions and level of detail agreed upon at the working group level.
- ◆ Consider the idea of creating a pilot LTES project with a citizen group to see how public interaction can support this process.

To date, Sandia and DOE/OSKO have moved ahead to address an important first issue -- public and government communications about LTES -- in smaller group discussions at the Community Resources Information Office. That office has moved ahead with a published version of the three original citizen task group reports with an introduction and a cover letter inviting further citizen participation. A second draft of the LTES plan for Sandia is expected in early 2003, based on progress made on key issues in the interim months.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

We learned several lessons during the course of this process.

First, we learned how absolutely critical it is to involve the public from the very beginning. Even before getting started, we worked with members of SSAB on developing the format and outline of the process.

It's also very important that participants and reviewers are clear about what the result of the process will be, so there is no confusion. It's especially important that this vision is made clear to those reviewers who are downstream in the process (and upstream in the management hierarchy) and don't have the benefit of knowing how the end-product evolved.

Flexibility is key in all areas, including time and content. The public doesn't want to be driven by arbitrary time constraints or deadlines. There should also be flexibility in the content of the plan so the report can be site-specific in nature and not overly generic, or "cookie cutter."

Finally, there is the delicate job of balancing the public and regulatory expectations of LTES with the still-evolving DOE approach. Not only is communication critical, but it's also important that we be able to follow through on our commitments so we can build trust with our public and our regulators.