

## **Public Education and Radioactive Waste - 9389**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Throughout the country the mention of anything nuclear or the word radiation ignites fear in the minds of many Americans. Political hype, news stories and the lack of basic understanding about nuclear power and radiation causes many people to reject what they do not understand. Often little, if any, thought may have been given to nearby nuclear weapons facilities where family members and neighbors were gainfully employed at these sites.

As older nuclear facilities are closed being a result of the end of the Cold War, with indications that radioactive materials might be transported to other parts of the country, the public in expressing concern. It is important that the public have an understanding of how these materials are handled to insure public safety. It becomes important that both the companies handling these materials and the U.S. Department of Energy create an environment that will involve community participation in developing strategies that will promote and support an understanding of how radioactive wastes will be packaged, transported, and disposed. This is being performed in Oak Ridge, TN. through the efforts of the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board (ORSSAB). The ORSSAB is a DOE sponsored board of private citizens from all walks of life and professionalism's.

The objective of this paper is to offer suggestions as to how public confidence, through education about nuclear, radioactive and associated and wastes are effectively handle the problems related to waste disposal, removal or on-site storage. It is essential that the public fully understand and become involved in the need for the reduction of the waste stream volumes and the technical problems being faced in reaching this goal.

The effort of gaining public understanding and support of this important task cannot be limited to just those within close proximity to the facility presently housing these materials, but must extend to those outlying areas and along any potential route that might be used to transport the radioactive materials.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Through the many years of public involvement of the Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board many issues have been overcome through the suggestions of various board and public members about the handling of contaminated material stored on the Oak Ridge reservation. The Department of Energy is accountable for the many left over drums and equipment stored on the reservation. With tighter administrative controls and the various Records of Decision that are required for each of the land cleanup areas this control is being improved. The independent verification of processes, procedures, equipment and sample radiological measurements are required for release of this land back to the public. Many of the companies that deal with proposed reuses have appeared before the group with evaluations of their findings of these areas and a better way of presenting a new solution to the Department of Energy.

Our area group has accomplished many different assessments, responding to many different recommendations about various properties and continuing the long term stewardship when these properties are handed over to the public. These entities include area county land recorders for development of private and commercial buildings on cleaned up property. These records will be the prime source of information to the general public as future generations proceed with new home development and industry coming to the area. Through the Stewardship Committee, we are working with the City of Oak Ridge, Anderson County, and Roane County property assessors, EPA, TDEC and the U.S. Department of Energy's Groundwater & Soils Remediation group to form a better bond and a greater confidence of the areas that have been cleaned up and how this was disposed of for future generations to come. Our liaison with the Office of Groundwater and Soil Remediation a prime example of how we work to have this agency provide a person of contact for the Oak Ridge site's cleanup program. The ongoing influence of the Stewardship committee has been to serve as a forum for discussions of topics relevant to long-term stewardship. Our mission statement is to educate the public of the progress in the area as well as preserving the history of the reservation. The ORSSAB'S focus at the Oak Ridge reservation is similar to other sites that are also under the supervision of the public and their communities' advisory group. The National Historic Preservation Act has placed several buildings related to the reservations on their Oak Ridge register. With the demolition of the K-25 building and other buildings at the site it brings new questions of how we can save some of our history that was left behind. This question has been addressed by various public members and brought before the committee to be addressed and presented to the DOE officials for their review. Our goal is to inform people that more circa of the 1942 buildings are deteriorating with the effects of time and weather, and should also be reviewed.

### **What the Future Holds**

A new committee was formed as a branch off of the Stewardship Committee known as the Stewardship Education Committee. This committee was formed to educate the public and students regarding cleanup efforts of the Department of Energy at the Oak Ridge Reservation, by the development of the Stewardship Education Kit.

A goal of this committee is to reach out to area schools within the city of Oak Ridge and in the surrounding counties to explain the Stewardship program and giving the students a basic background of the cleanup efforts at the reservation. Many students know the "plants" as Y-12, K-25 and ORNL (X-10) but have no idea of the other areas that have successfully followed a cleanup plan with the Department of Energy and taking recommendations from the Advisory Boards. This kit mostly explains, with a combination of lesson plans with the assistance of the University of Tennessee, hands on notebook with power point slides and references to internet material for classroom teaching. This tool of learning was presented to the Science, Biology, and Chemistry Departments to be used along with their regular teaching curriculum as reinforcement for high school advanced college program classes. We have also introduced this kit to Civics and History departments to give students an overview of the reservation as pertained to their subjects as a safe place of productivity, research, and an ever ongoing presence in our community offering jobs in research, and science. Oak Ridge should be viewed with a place of future research and development to our world now and ongoing, not thought of as a place that my parents or grandparents retired from. With the help of the developers of the kit we are continuing to improve the lesson plans and power point slides with changing ideas from participating community members. The largest influence on our Stewardship Committee is the ideas from the public. Through various outreach programs, mailings and updates of the project fact sheets that are made available at the DOE Information Center in Oak Ridge, TN.

## **CONCLUSION**

The advisory board's participation in the Oak Ridge Secret City Festival, Arbor Day Celebration, and the displaying of the kit at the American Museum of Science and Energy has enlightened the public by informing them that there is someone working in their best interest. This committee will continue to revolve members. As a person serves his or her term they will bring different and new ways of conveying to the Department of Energy areas of interest for cleanup. Through the involvement of other committees within the ORSSAB, the Environmental Management, Public Outreach, Board Finance and Process Committee's we are all linked together to the Executive Committee bringing our ideas for presentations at the monthly meeting which involves continuing public comment. We can make a difference with our minds collectively set in the right direction of cleanup of the legacy materials that won World War II.

## **REFERENCE**

Oak Ridge Site Specific Advisory Board  
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