

Making a Lasting Impression: Recovery Act Reporting At Hanford – 12528

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ABSTRACT

The award of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding came with an unprecedented request for transparency to showcase to the American public how the stimulus funding was being put to work to achieve the goals put forth by the U.S. Government. At the U.S. Department of Energy Hanford Site, this request manifested in a contract requirement to provide weekly narrative, photos and video to highlight Recovery Act-funded projects. For DOE contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M HILL), the largest recipient of Hanford's funding, the reporting mechanism evolved into a communications tool for documenting the highly technical cleanup, then effectively sharing that story with the DOE and its varying stakeholder audiences. The report set the groundwork for building a streaming narrative of week-by-week progress. With the end of the Recovery Act, CH2M HILL is applying lessons learned from this stringent, transparent reporting process to its long-term reporting and communications of the progress being made in nuclear decommissioning at Hanford.

INTRODUCTION

Across the nation, the award of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (Recovery Act) funding came with a request for transparency to showcase to the American public how the stimulus funding was being put to work. At the U.S. Department of Energy Hanford Site, the request for transparency, accountability and openness was intended to showcase to the public, government agencies, Congress and stakeholders alike how the money was both creating jobs and accelerating environmental cleanup of some of the nation's most hazardous waste. The request manifested in a requirement from the DOE Richland Operations (DOE-RL) office for contractors to provide weekly narrative, photos and video to highlight Recovery Act-funded projects.

In April 2009, when the Hanford Site was allocated \$1.9 billion to create and save jobs and accelerate cleanup, just as quickly as the new hires were put to work, so was their work documented in multiple media for the world to see. A contract modification was issued for DOE-RL Central Plateau and River Corridor cleanup contractors receiving Recovery Act funding. The requirements describe the unique reporting criteria for the duration of the Recovery Act funding at the Hanford Site. The standout requirement was a weekly deliverable that combined narrative, video and photo for all Recovery Act funded activities. The report was unmatched at Hanford for its multimedia approach and frequency.

For DOE contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company (CH2M HILL), the largest recipient of Hanford's funding, the weekly reporting mechanism evolved into a

communications tool for documenting the highly technical cleanup and the people behind the work and effectively sharing that story. The weekly report helped CH2M HILL enhance its ability to tell the ongoing narrative of how progress is made at the Hanford Site.

DESCRIPTION

Per the reporting requirements outlined in Contract No. DE-AC06-08RL14788 – Modification M047, Section G, CH2M HILL supplied on a weekly basis:

- 100-300 word narratives for each main project, written for a non-technical, public audience in clear and concise language
- 1-3 quality photos, of 300 dots per inch and cropped to 5 by 7 inches
- One 1-3 minute video, in two high definition formats
- Approximately 50-word summary of upcoming events for each project.

The goal was to provide a positive, understandable and comprehensive image of how CH2M HILL was achieving the ideals put forth by the government. The weekly report was driven by a clear set of expectations. M047 outlines the content and technical requirements for the writing and visuals that made up the report, including the writing style, photo size, and video format. The requirements identified a range of angles to be featured in the narratives such as “job fairs, hiring actions, training/mentoring actions, on-going field work, completed field work, contracting actions, safety accomplishments, hazard reduction, and cost savings (e.g., building going to cold, dark and dry saves \$X in S&M costs, etc.)” [1]. Especially unique to the Recovery Act reporting approach was communication of the job creation and hiring efforts, including profiles on workers to demonstrate how the funding was changing the lives of workers who had been out of work or struggling due to economic hardship. The reporting prompt reiterated the goals of the Recovery Act funding but also underpinned the communications ideal to highlight the people doing the work.

IMPLEMENTATION

CH2M HILL’s approach to implementing the reporting requirements was to first understand the requirements and implications and secure a team and the equipment necessary to provide the data, video and photos at the caliber requested.

CH2M HILL selected its Communications team as the primary manager for the weekly report under the assumption that the report would serve as a media driver and a tool for effectively publicizing CH2M HILL’s Recovery Act progress and accomplishments. While the Communications team would ultimately partner with project managers and Project Controls personnel to secure accurate metrics (number of buildings demolished, waste sites remediated, etc.), Communications personnel were able to deliver on the narrative, photo and visual elements and take the highly technical input from the field and turn it into a story fit for public consumption.

Narrative

Gathering weekly information required the support of Recovery Act project managers, who provided weekly status updates; a full-time communications specialist to compile the information into a single report and translate the information for a public audience; and a full-time videographer who shot, scripted, voiced and produced the weekly video. The team convened weekly to discuss the week's events and identify opportunities for photo/video in the coming weeks.

Recovery Act project managers in the field supplied the raw narrative for the report. The narrative highlighted the major project accomplishments on the project as well as upcoming work. The Recovery Act reporting requirements called for writing that fit an audience who is "a member of the public interested in Recovery Act activities who is familiar with the Hanford Mission" (DE-AC06-08RL14788). Therefore the content was revised and edited by a Communications specialist for clarity, complexity, and consistency – limiting the use of jargon, acronyms, passive voice, etc.

Photos

To obtain media-quality photos CH2M HILL procured high quality cameras that could achieve the appropriate resolution (300dpi) in the various work environments (i.e., dark lighting, long distance). Photo equipment was also required for workers in the field for photos of work being performed in areas where the communication specialist and videographer could not be present for safety or security reasons. The photos were resized to the right resolution and cropped to the designated size (5 by 7 inches) to better show the action. To accommodate the large file size of the photos, a share area was created to store and transfer all of the Recovery Act photos.

Video

The requirement of a 1-3 minute edited video showing work in progress was a first in CH2M HILL's project reporting effort. CH2M HILL hired a full-time videographer to produce the weekly video clips. To achieve the caliber of video requested, CH2M HILL procured 1) adequate equipment, including video cameras, microphones, tripods, camera bags, and batteries, 2) software and computer equipment for editing the video clips and saving them to the proper file type, and 3) equipment for the final product, including DV-Cam tapes, DVDs and a DVD label burner.

Safety

Working safely is CH2M HILL's top priority and this transcended reporting efforts as the reporters (communications specialists, videographers, photographers) deployed to work sites to achieve their deliverable without compromising safety or productivity. Additional safety equipment and training were required to enable the reporters to safely enter work sites and obtain media-worthy visuals. This included radiological worker training to access certain restricted areas of the site, additional safety gear (boots, gloves, jackets, etc.), badges, and several hours logged in training for safety, security and cultural

sensitivity. However, no matter the work site, safety was ultimately the deciding factor. Consistent with CH2M HILL's safety principle "If it doesn't feel safe, we don't do it" – Communications personnel did not crowd worksites or compromise the safety of themselves or others to complete their deliverable.

Clearance

To be cleared for public release, the report package was reviewed by safety, security, legal, and external affairs. Their review ensured the content was technically sound, appropriately representative of the company and the client, and that it did not include any material that could compromise or be perceived as compromising safety or security of the site. A software application was used that allowed the documents to be hosted in one location, reviewers were notified that their response was requested, and then reviewers were able to respond electronically. It was a labor-intensive task due to the size of the overall report package (20-plus pages, approximately 15 photos, and video footage). The clearance process required support from a document clearance specialist, who oversaw the approval from the various organizations via the electronic tracking system E-STARS and delivers the final weekly report package (including a printed copy of the report, a DVD and CD).

RESULTS

The final product was a multimedia-rich weekly report that built a streaming narrative of weekly progress and yielded a range of benefits and lessons learned.

Frequent and consistent messaging

The week-by-week narrative facilitated consistent messaging and communications by providing simple, succinct bits of progress on a frequent basis. The reports helped build an easily traceable narrative and news forecast. What began as a bullet in the report would be elaborated each week through narrative, photo captions and video scripts. CH2M HILL translated the report contents into stories for internal and external publications. Each week, the top stories and best photos from the report were pulled for a one-page newsletter and these stories subsequently evolved into larger pieces (press releases, fact sheets, etc.) and filtered to DOE and the media. Figure 1 describes the evolution of information from the weekly report to subsequent communications and reporting deliverables. Together, these pieces made up the comprehensive story of CH2M HILL Recovery Act progress in a way that was easily shared with DOE and stakeholder audiences.

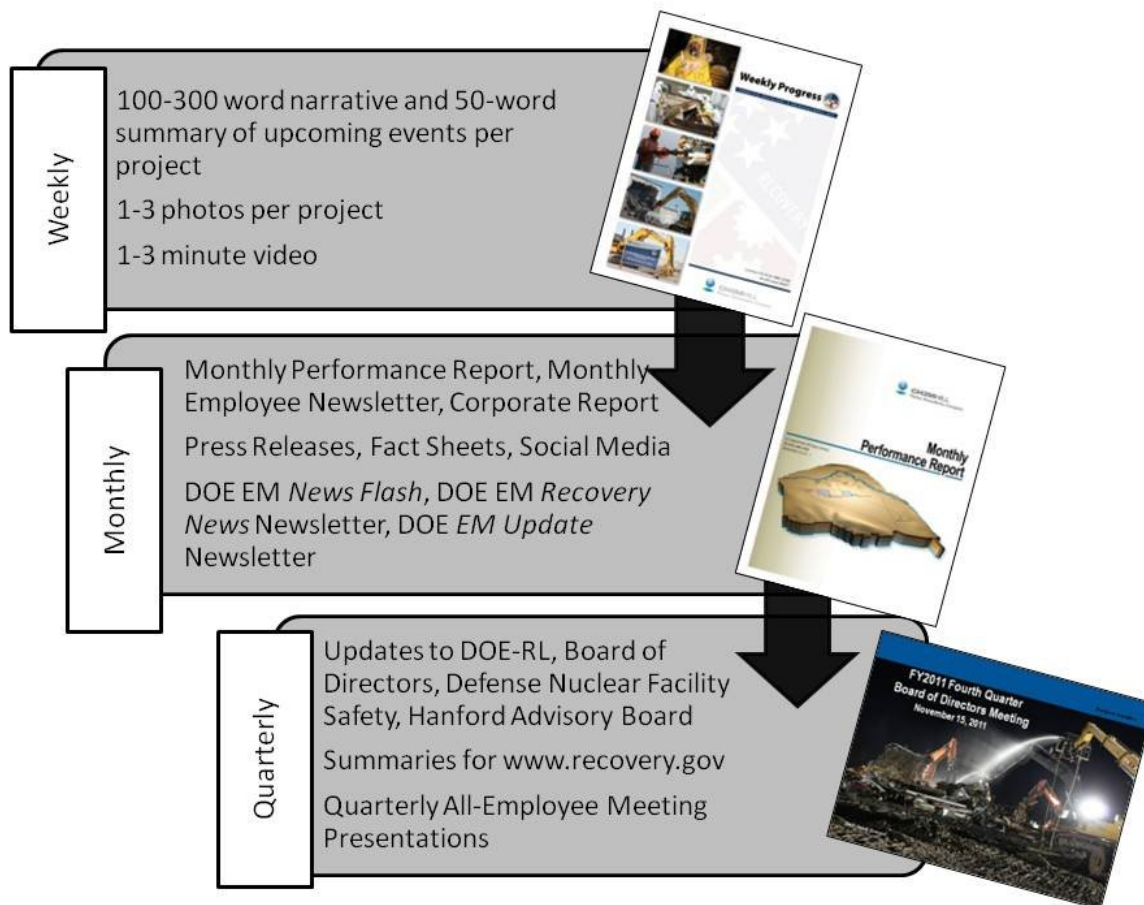


Fig 1. Evolution of the weekly report information into monthly and quarterly reporting and communications products.

Transparency to client and public

The reporting captured the details of the historic cleanup effort and the workers and subcontractors achieving progress on one of America's highest priority environmental cleanup projects. For years, this story has been a challenge to tell but thanks to the stimulus funding the work was suddenly in the public eye more than ever before, posing an additional challenge to communicators. The weekly report challenged CH2M HILL communicators to hit the field, like beat reporters, every week to find the stories, photos and video opportunities that would demonstrate progress and make sense to a public audience who was watching and reading not only to monitor cleanup progress but also to monitor economic impacts of the funding.

The final product was cleared for public release and posted online to DOE-RL's website, which helped demonstrate CH2M HILL and DOE's commitment to transparency and the free flow of information. The materials were made available to external audiences at:

- www.hanford.gov/recovery

- www.youtube.com/HanfordPlateau
- www.plateauremediation.hanford.gov

The Recovery Act story was readily available to the public and other stakeholders. Having the information cleared and readily available for public distribution streamlined the monthly and quarterly “fact finding” that usually ensued when a performance report or assessment was due – the material was already approved and accessible.

Multimedia inventory

As the largest recipient of Recovery Act funding on the Hanford Site, CH2M HILL had more Recovery Act-funded projects and created or saved more jobs than any contractor on site, which increased the amount of information to be reported and built a robust inventory of photos and videos highlighting the intricacies of cleanup work. CH2M HILL had five major Recovery Act projects and at least 20 subprojects to cover at any given time – this meant an average of 15 photos per report times every week for two and a half years. The result was an invaluable collection of quality visuals that, when strung together, make a comprehensive pictorial representation of Hanford’s Central Plateau cleanup.

Workforce Pride

The report emphasized the intricacies of CH2M HILL’s cleanup work – the most minute of activities to the most complex – as well as the people and the pride behind it. The Recovery Act focus on “putting people to work” translated into featuring workers impacted by the funding and re-emphasized the value of every worker. Recovery Act reporting put workers at the forefront, simultaneously highlighting the highly skilled workforce making it happen. Workers were welcoming to the cameras. The photos and videos that made up the weekly report flooded subsequent newsletters, presentations, social media sites and anywhere CH2M HILL reached with its Recovery Act success story. Workers could more frequently see themselves in print, online and in video. While work at Hanford has historically been secretive, the report request for materials ‘cleared for public release’ resulted in a large inventory of materials that was available for public consumption, including by employees and their families to share at home.

Comprehensive Coverage

It was only a matter of weeks before the repetition in activities was obvious and had the potential to disengage readers. It can take weeks if not months or even years of paperwork, labor and work packages before a building can be demolished or a waste site remediated – which could lead to weeks of updates like “Closure documentation is in progress” or “Demolition continued.” With more than two years worth of reports to populate, CH2M HILL communications specialists were challenged to find new details to showcase on a weekly basis. Thus the report came to emphasize not only the top-level accomplishments (buildings removed, groundbreakings, job fairs, etc.) but the planning,

preparation, and integration and most importantly the safety and teamwork that went into cleanup activities.

Integration

Producing an accurate and transparent report thrived on integration. Communications could not operate in a vacuum. Instead, the team networked with field representatives, project controls specialists, clearance personnel and a myriad of support functions to build a report that was both comprehensive and technically sound. Recovery Act reporting reinforced the initiative that Communications needed to integrate to ensure an accurate understanding and representation of the project. Every work activity is documented – work planning is part of the CH2M HILL Integrated Safety Management System. Thus Communications used projects' work planning and reporting tools which helped ensure accuracy by using materials directly produced (and approved) by project leads.

Recovery Act work was tracked independently of CH2M HILL's original scope, essentially like a second baseline or scope of work. For communicators, this meant constantly asking the question "Is this Recovery Act funded?" There were instances where only part of a project could be funded by stimulus dollars. For example, a building was prepared for demolition with stimulus funds but the actual demolition was supported by non-Recovery Act funds. The challenge underpinned the need for Communications personnel to be engaged with the projects to better understand their scope, challenges and progress.

DISCUSSION

In the end, the weekly report that was initially required to maintain transparency of Recovery Act funding helped contractor CH2M HILL enhance its ability to share with both internal and external audiences the ongoing narrative of how progress is made at the Hanford Site. The daunting task of weekly reporting for mixed audiences - DOE, stakeholders and the general public - brought with it advantages, challenges and lessons learned applicable to others in the industry.

Each week, the report delivered a simple but comprehensive multimedia-rich snapshot of all of CH2M HILL's projects on Hanford's Central Plateau. Each narrative was accompanied by a quality photo and descriptive caption. The final package was complete with the addition of a short, scripted video that elaborated on at least one of the week's accomplishments. This went on for two and a half years. The result was an enriched written and visual timeline of how CH2M HILL implemented \$1.3 billion scope. The unexpected benefit and lasting advantage of the report was the impact it had on CH2M HILL's communications abilities beyond the life of the Recovery Act.

The evolution of the report information transformed into increased consistency in messaging. Content in the report matched subsequent materials delivered to DOE and stakeholders. The content (short, descriptive narrative, video scripts and captions included) was easily transformed into monthly, quarterly and annual news and

performance reports presented to DOE as well as stakeholders, such as the Hanford Advisory Board. The report demonstrated CH2M HILL's commitment to its DOE client and stakeholders to maintain transparency with the delivery of a report that detailed the week's progress.

Although Hanford's Recovery Act funding came to an end, CH2M HILL is applying lessons learned from the stringent, transparent reporting process to its long-term reporting and communications of the progress being made in nuclear decommissioning at Hanford. CH2M HILL aims to maintain reporting expectations similar to the weekly Recovery Act report:

- **Narratives** – Whether from project managers or from weekly project reports, gathering the “major accomplishments” weekly builds the streaming narrative necessary to provide input to performance, media and progress reports and it keeps clients and stakeholders up to date.
- **Video** – CH2M HILL launched an internal news broadcast using the Recovery Act videos and will maintain the tool into the future. The content has expanded to include site-wide safety and company news. The segment, called *InSite*, has become the most viewed communications tool at CH2M HILL's project.
- **Photos** – The constant influx of high quality photos established a substantial inventory of visuals that document the cleanup of a legacy. Like the black and white photos from decades ago, the photos are the visual record of Hanford's weapons production legacy and the new legacy of Hanford cleanup. These photos not only service CH2M HILL communications efforts – they also capture the last moment for some of Hanford's oldest structures.

A similar higher level, proactive communication strategy can potentially benefit other organizations in the nuclear industry with similar scopes of work and client/stakeholder relations. The methodical reporting partnered with vibrant multimedia facilitates transparency and awareness of both accomplishments and challenges with projects and fosters stronger partnering, understanding and possibly funding. The constant flow of information arms the contractor and subsequently DOE and stakeholders with a comprehensive narrative of progress and challenges and streamlines sharing of consistent messages with internal and external audiences.

REFERENCES

1. DE-AC06-08RL14788, Plateau Remediation Contract.