

Public Outreach in FUSRAP – 16201

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ABSTRACT

The U. S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is the lead federal agency for the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP) which was initiated in 1974 to address contamination remaining from Manhattan Engineer District and early U.S. Atomic Energy Commission activities. As the lead agency, USACE follows the protocols set forth in the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) to address FUSRAP sites. During certain project milestones of the CERCLA process, community outreach initiatives occur to communicate the status and/or findings from site investigations and project decision documents. The style of public interaction is tailored to match the project milestone, technical complexity of a project, the stakeholder involvement level, or type of decision being made on a particular project.

Community involvement is one of the most important aspects of environmental work, and proactive and transparent communication can build meaningful relationships with the community and between project stakeholders. The USACE Buffalo District has experience using different stakeholder interaction techniques and providing information on projects through a variety of media. Rather than simply distributing information, the goal of community outreach is to encourage participation in the process and to provide opportunities for the public to fully understand, ask questions about, and provide feedback on the complex technical issues involved in decision-making for each FUSRAP site.

The frequency and method of interaction depends on the project, and the USACE Buffalo District has worked to promote openness and transparency and to ensure the community is provided with many opportunities for public participation. Project information has been provided to stakeholders using multiple techniques, such as formal project workshops, poster sessions, site tours, news releases, storybooks, and videos. Aside from project-specific community relations plans, the USACE Buffalo District has participated in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs established to inspire current and future generations of young people to pursue careers in STEM fields. Each year, the USACE Buffalo District performs outreach in the community to share information on our projects as well as to introduce students to various disciplines associated with environmental careers.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Buffalo District is responsible for 10 of 25 sites being addressed under the Formerly Utilized Sites Remedial Action Program (FUSRAP) throughout the United States. The Corps of Engineers follows the protocols set forth in the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation,

and Liability Act (CERCLA), as amended, and the National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) when implementing FUSRAP. Included in implementation of the program is the requirement for public participation (CERCLA Section 117[a] and the NCP [40 Code of Federal Regulations 300.430(c); 300.430(f)(2), (3) and (6); and 300.435(c)]). While meeting the minimum requirement satisfies the lead agency's legal responsibility, additional outreach above the minimum requirement maximizes relationship building.

BUFFALO DISTRICT'S COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

The goals of USACE Buffalo District's community relations program are to:

- Foster and maintain a climate of understanding and trust with the public
- Ensure that the public understands that protecting human health and the environment is the paramount concern at our FUSRAP sites
- Encourage and enable all interested members of the public to be involved and provide input
- Foster opportunities for genuine dialogue regarding issues of importance to the community
- Prepare information and provide opportunities for the public to fully understand, ask questions about, and provide input on the complex technical issues involved in decision-making for each FUSRAP site
- Listen carefully to what the public expresses
- Identify and act responsively on public concerns
- Allow for flexible planning to enable public comments or concerns to be considered during decision-making and before executing actions

Each USACE Buffalo District FUSRAP site is unique, and the characteristics of the community in which the site is located are unique as well. The NCP requires development of a community relations plan for each site. The plan is a public document tailored specifically to the preferences of the community. Each plan identifies the stakeholders for a site; summarizes the community relations history for the site, the community's concerns, and the Corps of Engineers' response to those concerns; and outlines the community relations activities that will be conducted for a site.

Individual rollout plans, which are internal planning documents used to communicate relevant community issues to senior management, are developed by the USACE Buffalo District before the release of each major CERCLA report. These plans include key messages, talking points, potential critics and their potential issues, and all of the products necessary for the release of the document (transmittal letter, fact sheet, news release, website posting, and "News from the Corps" emails). These rollout plans are therefore used as a tool to obtain senior management agency support of the extensive outreach efforts being undertaken by the team along each step of the CERCLA process for a given project. They also allow senior agency management to act as spokespersons for a project when necessary, e.g., when members of Congress or other elected officials approach the agency with concerns about a project.

To build a relationship of trust, it is important to interact with community members and develop a dialogue. Although we are in an electronic age, this is best achieved with face-to-face meetings, such as public meetings, workshops, information sessions, poster sessions, and open houses. Since dialogue is two-way communication, it not only involves the Corps of Engineers disseminating information; it also involves the Corps of Engineers listening to the feedback from the community and incorporating its input whenever possible. An example of how this works can be seen with the Tonawanda Landfill Vicinity Property to the Linde FUSRAP Site. In 2007, the USACE Buffalo District released a Proposed Plan for the vicinity property recommending no action as the preferred alternative. Comments received from the community, elected officials, and stakeholders indicated opposition to the lack of action at this site. In addition, feedback from the community indicated that people were spending more time on the open landfill area and residing longer in the adjacent neighborhood than was initially considered in the risk calculations. Based mainly on the feedback from these residents regarding their actual frequency and duration of exposure to the FUSRAP site, the USACE Buffalo District performed additional sampling and updated the baseline risk assessment for the Landfill Operable Unit of the vicinity property. This additional investigation and evaluation identified a potential future human health risk requiring action under CERCLA. During 2015, the USACE Buffalo District released a new Feasibility Study and Proposed Plan recommending targeted shallow removal of FUSRAP-related material within the Landfill Operable Unit. At the recent public meeting during which the USACE Buffalo District released the new Proposed Plan, Tonawanda's mayor provided public comments supporting this preferred alternative.

The following is a summary of some of the community relations tools and activities used individually or combined for the USACE Buffalo District's FUSRAP sites whenever a major document is released.

Public Meetings

The public meeting is the most formal means of receiving input from the community. The NCP requires this format during the public comment period for a Proposed Plan. It involves a formal presentation by the Corps of Engineers. This is followed by a formal public comment period, during which comments are recorded and questions may be answered. A court recorder is used to prepare a transcript of the presentation and public comment portion of the meeting (Photo 1). This format is preferred over that of a public hearing where comments are recorded and responses to questions are not provided.

The Buffalo District recently experimented with having the court recorder available to record individual comments during a poster session held immediately before two formal public meetings. (An explanation of the poster session format is provided below.) This gave attendees the opportunity to present oral comments without the anxiety over having to stand in front of the entire audience. While a large percentage of those who attended both formal public meetings came early to participate in the poster session and speak directly with project team members,

only one person chose to submit a recorded comment during this time at the first meeting and no comments were recorded during this time at the second meeting.



Photo 1 – Presentation at Public Meeting

Information Sessions

The information session is less formal than a public meeting, and it does not require a court recorder. A presentation is the major focus of the meeting, and there is opportunity for questions and answers after. This type of meeting is used when new information about site conditions is available; for example, when the remedial investigation or a technical memorandum is completed. This format is also used to brief employees at FUSRAP sites that include operating industrial facilities, such as the Linde or Superior Steel FUSRAP projects. Combining the presentation with team availability at posters before and after the meeting is recommended to encourage one-on-one dialogue with community members.

Workshops

The USACE Buffalo District began using a presentation and round table discussion format with the audience as a whole for its workshops with the community at the Niagara Falls Storage Site (NFSS) FUSRAP project. After the presentation, the meeting room furnishings were rearranged into a large rectangle of tables, so that as many of the audience as possible could sit at the tables alongside Corps of Engineers team members. Microphones were placed on the tables to encourage discussion. This meeting format did not work. The question and answer sessions were dominated by splenetics who were anti-Corps, and the format was detrimental to the Corps' reputation. The Buffalo District hired a facilitator to work with the community, and the format for the workshops was changed. Although a

presentation was still given, round table discussions were broken into two or three smaller discussion groups with the topic being different at each discussion group; the audience rotated to each of the discussions groups, and experts were available for each specific topic (Photo 2). Members of the community took notes for each discussion group and reported back to the audience at large at the end of the evening. The opportunity for grandstanding was diffused, and the meetings were much more productive.



Photo 2 – Round Table Discussion at Public Workshop

Poster Sessions

Poster sessions are the least formal of our meetings with the community. They are conducted most frequently to update the community on the status of the site, especially before the start of remediation. They're also held when there is no new information but the Buffalo District has not recently communicated with the community. They are open house in fashion, and community members can attend at any time during the time slot that the project team is available. Several posters are developed, and individual team members are assigned to one or two posters based on their field of expertise. Depending on the number of participants, community members are introduced to the team members as they pass from poster to poster; the participants can carry on one-on-one conversations with each team member, and they can ask and receive answers to questions or express their concerns. This is the best type of meeting to conduct for developing relationships and building trust within the community. It does not provide the opportunity for grandstanding by audience members or the monopolization of the question and answer period after a presentation, but it does allow community members to express their views and have their questions answered.

Conducting poster sessions in conjunction with (before and after) public meetings, workshops or information sessions is recommended to allow individuals to talk with and ask questions of project team members face to face (Photo 3). For example, poster sessions are beneficial to provide general background information on a FUSRAP site and to present key messages at a certain step of the CERCLA process. The USACE Buffalo District typically has a poster session before and after each public workshop. Occasionally, depending on the step a project is in in the CERCLA process or the type of information being presented, a poster session can be used in place of a full public workshop. For example a poster session alone might be appropriate if a Feasibility Study is released when only information on alternatives is being presented, and there is no Proposed Plan or a decision has not been made.



Photo 3 – Poster Session Example

Focus Groups

A facilitator was hired for the NFSS FUSRAP project in Lewiston, New York, and a community action council comprising key interested parties within the community, elected officials, and agency representatives was formed to work with the facilitator. This smaller community group acted to diffuse a contentious relationship with the community. Meetings are conducted frequently with this small group of interested citizens. Often new information is provided to the group before being released to the general public. The community action council's input is provided to make an outreach product more understandable to the community or to improve it. For example, draft presentations for future public meetings have been discussed and the community action council provided useful comments on how to improve slides, content, or the overall message delivery to ensure the important portions of the presentation are highlighted and easily understood. The community group also hosts meetings during which the Corps is the guest speaker, and informal discussions are held to explain the environmental monitoring or investigations at

NFSS and the status of the site within the CERCLA process. The relationship between the Corps and the community has greatly improved since the USACE Buffalo District started using this method of interaction and participation.

Beyond the Headlines and News from the Corps

News releases are a common tool used for FUSRAP sites to communicate major project updates or CERCLA document completions. However, for some sites the Buffalo District realized that news releases were not getting out the story we wanted to communicate. The media seemed to be twisting certain project news or slanting it, so the Buffalo District began using "Beyond the Headlines" and "News from the Corps" to limit the opportunity for the media to print misinformation or to slant a story. "Beyond the Headlines" are posts on the project website to correct anything that was published by the media that was erroneous. The "News from the Corps" are emails distributed to those who are interested in a particular site; they make the public aware of the corrections to the misinformation and communicate information directly to the interested community. The first step that must be accomplished before a "News from the Corps" email can be sent is to gather email addresses for all parties interested in a site. This is done by including room for an individual's email address on the sign in sheets that are provided at all public meetings. Emails are also gathered for elected officials, property owners, and state and federal agency project stakeholders as well. Developing a comprehensive email list for the community interested in a project is key; for example, there are several hundred email addresses on the contact list for the NFSS FUSRAP project. For a period of time, the Buffalo District stopped providing news releases directly to the media. Instead, the media were notified of new information regarding a site at the same time as the community was made aware by sending a "News from the Corps" electronic mailing. Releasing information this way made the media more accountable; since the most interested portion of their audience already knew the correct information, they were less likely to twist the story. Media will often quote directly from the "News from the Corps" and have on several occasions printed the "News from the Corps" as an editorial in the newspaper rather than preparing a separate article.

INNOVATIVE PUBLIC OUTREACH INITIATIVES

Aside from required public input received at key stages of the CERCLA process, the Buffalo District has developed some unique presentation materials to explain aspects of a project that may not be well known to stakeholders. The following examples are recent outreach initiatives developed for the NFSS project.

Storybooks

In 2013 USACE developed a storybook to provide an understanding of the work performed and the findings of the Balance of Plant Operable Unit investigation. The storybook was designed to work like an online menu where pages could be flipped from the corner. As a way to inform stakeholders, the storybook explained the entire field investigation and included photographs and diagrams to explain how the fieldwork is performed (Photos 4, 5 & 6). For example, the storybook included

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maps, historical aerial photographs, descriptions and photographs of radiological detectors screening soil, diagrams of groundwater wells, and step-by-step processes of how wells were installed. The storybook is currently available on the project's website, and copies were distributed at a public meeting where the investigation results were presented.



Photo 4 - NFSS Storybook

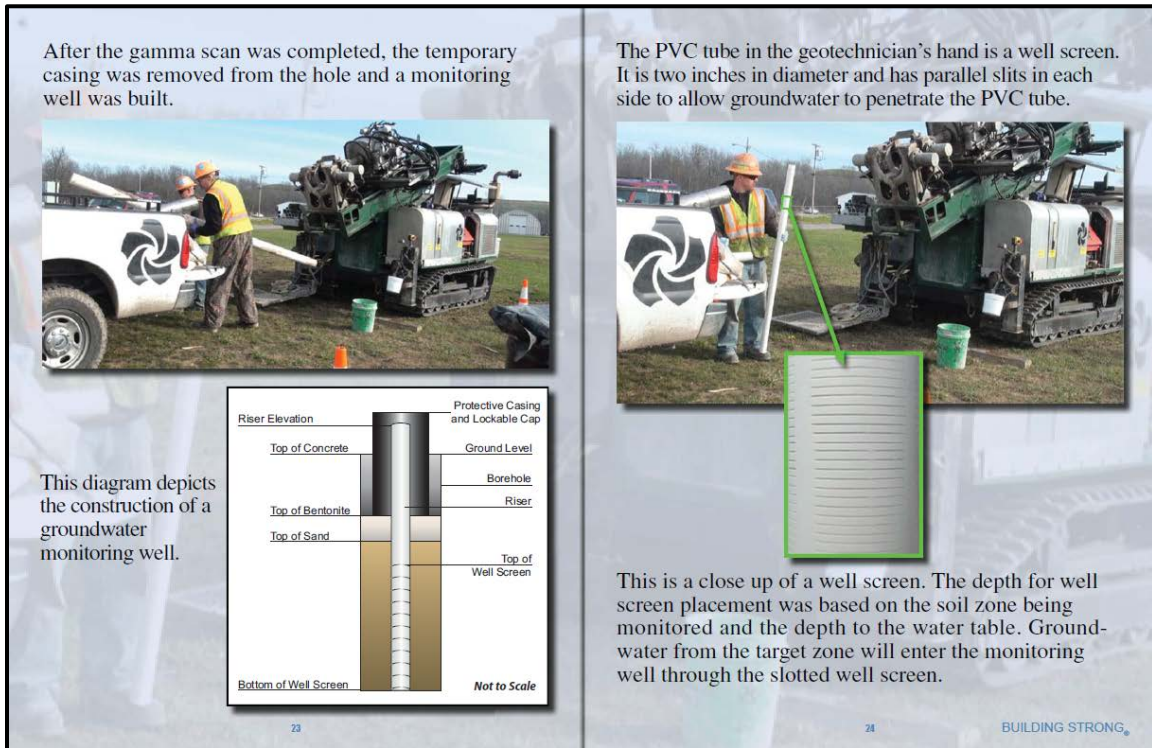


Photo 5 - NFSS Storybook

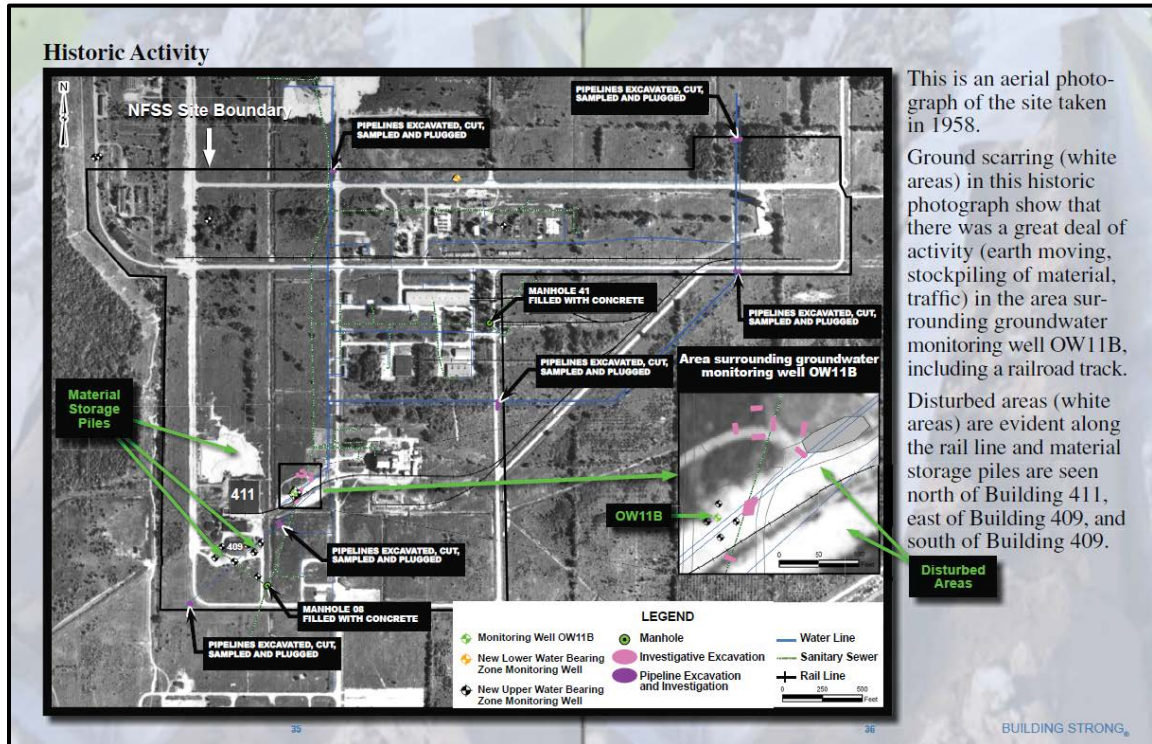


Photo 6 - NFSS Storybook

Cartoon Videos

Another outreach tool developed by the Buffalo District was a cartoon to explain the process involved with selecting and evaluating regulations and requirements applicable to the NFSS Interim Waste Containment Structure Feasibility Study. The presentation of legal regulations and requirements that apply to a FUSRAP site can be challenging to present to the public. Therefore, a completely new format was developed in the form of an animated cartoon to describe the process in which regulations are considered and in what cases they are not applicable for further consideration in the Feasibility Study process. Photos 7 and 8 show screen captures from part of the Applicable or Relevant and Appropriate Requirements (ARAR) cartoon developed for the NFSS. A draft cartoon was developed and presented to the local community action council and further updated based on its feedback.



Photo 7 – ARAR Cartoon

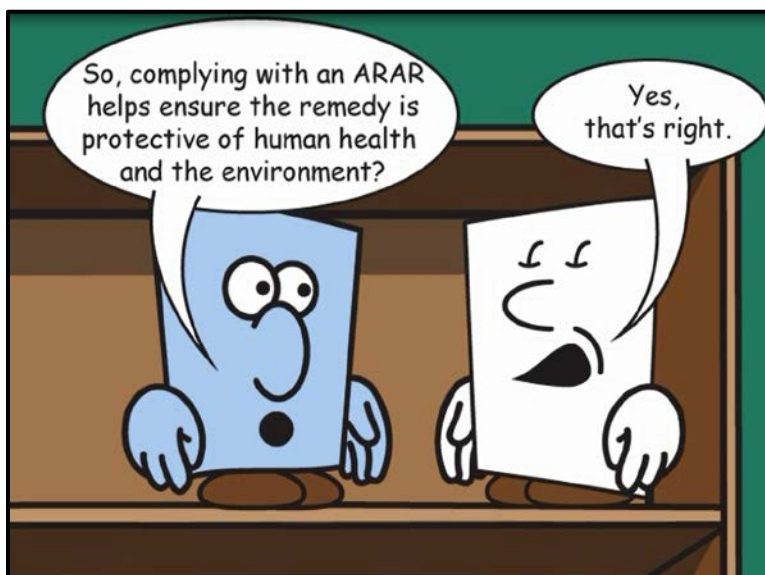


Photo 8 – ARAR Cartoon

Information Videos

Two additional videos are currently being developed for the NFSS to explain site history as well as the environmental monitoring program conducted at the site. These videos have been presented to the community and revised based on feedback received from the community action council.

Site Tours

Another form of outreach that has been performed at the NFSS is the community/stakeholder site tour. On multiple occasions, USACE has hosted the community and stakeholders on the NFSS for a presentation and site tour. Most recently, the community action council and elected officials were invited to the NFSS to view the sampling locations selected for an ongoing field investigation. After a brief presentation inside a building on site, the tour group was guided around the site in a chartered bus where the site history was discussed, and areas where sampling was to be performed were marked with stakes. Sampling plans and maps were available, and an open question and answer session was held throughout the tour to discuss both the site history as well as the current investigation. The Corps of Engineers has also given site tours at other FUSRAP sites for key stakeholders; e.g., federal, state, and local elected officials. .

On-line Tools

Each Buffalo District FUSRAP site has a website that includes its community relations plan, fact sheets, news releases, "News from the Corps," and major project reports. Some of the Buffalo District projects also post work plans for public review and comment on the web. Administrative record files are maintained electronically in libraries for most of our sites. The Tonawanda Landfill Vicinity Property has the entire administrative record available online. These reference tools are an asset to those researching our projects.

Social Media

The Buffalo District uses social media to get our message out as well. Facebook posts and Twitter announcements are made when new information is available. A public affairs officer from the Buffalo District will often attend public meetings and tweet during the meeting to provide real-time communication with the public regarding the meeting's events. This enlarges the involvement in the meeting beyond those attending in person.

Stakeholder Reports

Every year, the USACE Buffalo District prepares a comprehensive Stakeholder Report on the FUSRAP. This provides a brief description and status update on all of the Buffalo District FUSRAP sites and includes site photographs. Its main target audience is elected officials, and it serves to communicate and highlight progress that is made each year at each of the FUSRAP sites.

Science, Engineering, Technology, and Math (STEM)

The USACE is committed to teaming with others to strengthen STEM-related programs, in compliance with the USACE STEM policy (OPORD 2014-40), that inspire current and future generations of young people to pursue careers in STEM fields. Each year, the Buffalo District performs outreach in the community to share information on our projects as well as to show students various disciplines within environmental careers. The following events are recent examples of outreach applicable to FUSRAP conducted by the Buffalo District.

STEM Outreach for Teachers

The USACE Buffalo District's equal employment opportunity (EEO) office sponsored math and science teachers from a local charter school (Buffalo, NY) to visit the Niagara Falls Storage Site in 2014 to learn about FUSRAP as well as the applications of math and science used in the environmental branch. The eight teachers who visited taught a variety of subjects, including physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics (geometry/algebra/calculus, etc.). A historical overview of the NFSS was provided, along with information regarding how USACE applies math and science to each aspect of the CERCLA process (from environmental monitoring, risk assessment, remedial investigations, and remedial action). Additional information was provided regarding innovative technologies used at FUSRAP projects. In addition, a discussion was held about some of the USACE Buffalo District's unique and challenging projects. The teachers also observed how groundwater samples are collected during the site's environmental surveillance program.



Photo 9 - FUSRAP Demonstration for Area Charter School Teachers

STEM Outreach for Students

The USACE Buffalo District's Public Affairs Office (PAO) sponsors engineering week activities each year, which provide local students from different schools an opportunity to learn about the various projects and engineering disciplines within the Corps. As part of engineering week, students often rotate through the district and are exposed to different demonstrations and presentations by scientists and engineers. Each year district environmental engineers, health physicists, and chemists provide demonstrations on various environmental monitoring and radiological survey equipment and general overviews of radiologically contaminated sites.

Another opportunity for FUSRAP outreach, through the PAO, is through shadow day programs that some area schools offer. In 2015, students were able to tour the NFSS and observe groundwater sampling techniques as well as learn from project environmental engineers about the CERCLA process, and how we approach environmental projects.



Photo 10 – FUSRAP Demonstration for Local Students

STEM General Outreach

As part of Buffalo District's PAO-sponsored Engineers Week 2015 activities and demonstration of STEM fields, a FUSRAP health physicist and chemist took part in an all-day event at the Buffalo Museum of Science demonstrating the use of radiation and chemical instruments during environmental investigations. The program was tailored to all age groups.



Photo 11 - Environmental Monitoring Demonstration at the Buffalo Museum of Science

CONCLUSION

Community involvement is required and if not encouraged, can cause delays to your project and negative publicity for your agency. If conducted properly, a relationship of trust can be built with the community. Once the members of the community become more aware of what is happening at a site, they become more comfortable talking with the Corps; they become less wary.

Community involvement is one of the most important aspects of environmental work; proactive and transparent communication can build meaningful relationships with the community as well as between project stakeholders. The USACE Buffalo District has experience using different stakeholder interaction techniques and providing information on projects through a variety of media.

REFERENCES

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Buffalo District, FUSRAP Home Page 2015. <http://www.lrb.usace.army.mil/Missions/HTRW/FUSRAP.aspx>

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Public outreach is truly a team effort, and every member of the USACE Buffalo District FUSRAP group participates with public interactions and works together to build meaningful relationships with stakeholders. Outreach is a culmination of effort from multiple branches within the District that consists of the FUSRAP project managers and outreach specialists within the Special Projects Branch, technical staff within the Environmental Branch (Environmental Engineering and

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Environmental Health Sections), as well as support from the Public Affairs and Visual Information Offices.