

## **ASTSWMO POLICY POSITION PAPER ON COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AT FEDERAL FACILITIES**

### **BACKGROUND**

The history of Community Involvement on federal facility sites has been one of staggered improvement across the nation. The process, priority, and status of community involvement differs significantly not only from each of the 50 States and 6 Territories, but also from site to site. This depends on service priorities, agency lead (State or Environmental Protection Agency [EPA]), resources, community economic levels and project manager focus. These inherent differences have contributed toward the level of frustration noted by citizens, regulators, and service components.

Community Involvement is a requirement of federal and/or State environmental regulations and ideally, should be adhered to by all parties. While it is important that EPA or the State has the lead in community involvement activities, consistent Department of Defense (DoD) support is critical to provide uniformity of program implementation nationwide. Recognizing that each site is unique with specific needs, a more consistent approach to the community involvement process would minimize commonly identified problems.

### **ISSUES**

- Community Involvement is often initiated late in the cleanup process after the project team have investigated and made final decisions.
- Community Involvement programs have not consistently attempted to reach out to and involve the full range of stakeholders including environmental justice communities.
- Community Involvement requirements, issues and concerns are viewed as burdensome and an impediment to cleanup rather than as a necessary element of the process that facilitates implementation of the cleanup.
- Community Involvement goals become irrelevant as government agencies hold to their positions of authority in the decision-making process. All parties must be committed to a collaborative and consistent approach that benefits the community.
- Community Involvement goals are compromised where financial and personnel resources are constrained. State agency goals can only be met if federal agencies provide funding and plan in advance for public participation during key project milestones.

### **POSITION**

It is ASTSWMO's position that community involvement and outreach should be a prime consideration at each federal facility. At a minimum, the following should be considered:

**Ensure Public Participation:**

- It is critical that all stakeholders and the community be informed and updated on environmental issues and be afforded a process for meaningful input at all levels of the decision-making.
- Federal agencies must promote an active public role to facilitate understanding of the communities' needs and to facilitate a collaborative approach to project implementation.

**Maintain and Develop Partnerships:**

- Federal and State agencies must commit to an open communication and decision-making process in order to effectively implement community involvement responsibilities and goals on a timely manner.
- Customized community involvement strategies should be developed in coordination with States to encourage public support of proposed cleanup decisions.

**Dedicate Funding and Resources:**

- Federal agencies should invest the resources and staff expertise necessary to implement effective community involvement.
- Federal agencies should ensure early State involvement in the budgetary planning process.
- Budgets should anticipate and include the appropriate level of public participation for the duration of cleanup and long-term operation and maintenance of federal facilities.

**CONCLUSION**

The ASTSWMO Board of Directors encourages its membership to work towards assessing the applicability of these issues and identify current State needs to improve the community involvement process at federal facility cleanup sites. The Association will continue to promote close coordination with other associations and agencies aimed at promoting community involvement opportunities, scope out issues and enhance public participation opportunities that yield satisfying resolutions to contamination problems at federal facility sites.

Adopted by the ASTSWMO Board of Directors, April 22, 2008, in Mobile, Alabama.