

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



# Effective Meetings with the Facility

Communication tool for a RCRA Corrective Action Project Manager

Meetings can be productive means of accelerating a Corrective Action or a waste of time. Whether a meeting is productive or nonproductive depends, in part, on you as a Project Manager. You can improve the likelihood of a productive meeting(s) with tangible outcomes by applying some of the ideas and practices provided below.

As a RCRA Corrective Action Project Manager, you may meet routinely with the representatives of a facility undergoing a Corrective Action. A productive working relationship with the facility may make your job easier, more enjoyable and may help the facility achieve Corrective Action Results more quickly and successfully. A productive working relationship is often created through shared successes, and effective meetings can be one way to help create shared successes. Meetings are a productive means to share ideas, educate the facility, obtain information first-hand, and provide information first-hand. Meetings are an opportunity to conduct a site walk of the facility; to meet with key facility personnel, especially those with past history of the facility, and those who will be involved in implementing a Corrective Action; to review the facility's Conceptual Site Model, or to share yours; to openly and informally discuss future land use options; and to share and informally discuss other ideas.

This communication tool will assist you in helping promote or build productive meetings between the regulatory agencies and the facility to achieve a RCRA Corrective Action Result.

Key actions you can take to help create productive meetings include:

- ***Focus discussions on Something Tangible, Specific, and in Common.*** Discussions between a facility and a regulatory agency can be very general, non-specific, and highly theoretical. You may find yourself frustrated when what you thought you heard does not correlate with the actions or activities following a "meeting of the minds". In meetings, by focusing the facility's and your attention on something very tangible, specific, and in common, you increase the likelihood that meeting outcomes produce more tangible results. Environmental Indicators (EIs), a Conceptual Site Model (CSM), or groundwater models are some examples of topics that are very tangible, specific, and ideally in common. Some Regional Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) offices request the facility complete EI forms so that the EPA office and the facility then compare forms and better define areas of agreement and disagreement. These offices find this focuses the discussions on the more technical versus conceptual topics, and a Corrective Action proceeds more readily.
- ***Get the 'Right' People to Participate.*** Much work goes into making effective Corrective Action decisions. The process can often take months or years. The discussions, the selection of assumptions, the choice of risk assessment scenarios - all these lead over time to Corrective Action decisions. A method to streamline decision-making is to involve the 'right' people throughout the process, even during early stages of information gathering and decision-making. The 'right' people are those in the position to make Corrective Action decisions. This may often include a facility representative who is empowered to make Corrective Action decisions. It will also likely include their consultants. Find out who these people are, and meet with them to make best use of your time.
- ***Clarify Roles and Responsibilities.*** It is important to maintain your role as a representative of a regulatory agency. The facility will benefit by your clarifying your role in these meetings and in the RCRA Corrective Action process. You will benefit from hearing the facility verbalize what they view as their role and their responsibilities in the Corrective Action process. You more easily can

correct any misunderstandings when you are aware of areas of misperception. Clarifying roles and responsibilities is especially important in the area of public participation, where you and the facility have joint responsibilities.

- ***Maintain Regular Meetings.*** A RCRA Corrective Action, like all successful endeavors, requires a continuous focus of attention and energy over time. Quarterly meetings, for example, are one means to keep the attention and energy of the facility and regulatory agency focused on achieving the same Corrective Action Results. You can help monitor regular meetings by creating an ongoing schedule agreed to by all participants. Scheduling the time on everyone's calendar can often be difficult, and you can avoid the hassles of scheduling these meetings by setting up a regular date, for example "the Tuesday of the first full week of each quarter."
- ***Create a "Roadmap."*** A "Roadmap" is a plan with milestones, an approach to achieving an end result, in this case Corrective Action Results. By working with the facility to outline a "Roadmap" to achieve a Corrective Action, you can provide your input and suggestions and also have an idea of how the facility plans to proceed and what progress you can expect. Creating a plan with milestones helps reduce unwanted surprises or misunderstandings, and it creates a common tool that you and the facility can use to move toward a Corrective Action Result.
- ***Clarify Important Decisions.*** Meetings are important opportunities to not only exchange information, but also to clarify past decisions, suggest tentative future decisions, and clarify a present course of action. With the 'right' people present, this is an opportunity to discuss and get as close as possible to clarifying a decision or the "next steps." Summarize decisions at the meeting, and check to ensure you and everyone have a correct understanding. Together, create a feedback mechanism or a means for everyone to obtain the same information arising out of the meeting. One method is to write your summary of decisions or 'next steps' on flip chart paper during the meeting and obtain everyone's feedback as to the accuracy of your understanding. These can be converted to notes and distributed to all participants after the meeting. Meeting notes might be taken by a designated note-taker, with an agreement to finalize or agree to the content of the notes in a conference call 2 weeks after the meeting.
- ***Acknowledge the Shared Successes.*** Success breeds more success. Recognize and build on successes, such as the ability of your agency and the facility to agree on the fundamental aspects of a conceptual site model, or the success a facility has achieved in accomplishing an Interim Action. Mention the successes, ask the representatives at the meetings what helped create these successes, and encourage the group to continue building on these activities and behaviors that resulted in a success.

