

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

## MEETING MINUTES

Fairmont Community Liaison Panel

October 7, 1999

Attendees: Michael Cummings, Georgeann Grewe, Karen Gribben, Bea Hunter, Bruce McDaniel, Kevin McClung, John Parks, Robert Sapp, Ron Swope.

Exxon Representatives: Art Chin, John Hannig.

Agency Representatives: Hilary Thornton, Rich Kuhn, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Thomas Bass, West Virginia Division of Environmental Protection (WVDEP).

Guests: Denise Amitrani, Exxon; David Choiniere; Keith Craig; Griff Fowler; Jason Hart; Daniel Jones; Donna Jones; Jackie Marhefka, Fairmont Times-West Virginian; Don Martin; Nathan Rohrbough, WDTV; Tom Stukas, Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry (ATSDR); Doug Taylor; Danny Vincent

Facilitator: Roberta Fowlkes, Ann Green Communications, Inc.

Minutes: Dan T. Londeree, Ann Green Communications, Inc.

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The October meeting of the Fairmont Community Liaison Panel (FCLP) was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Roberta Fowlkes, facilitator. Guests introduced themselves. Tom Stukas explained ATSDR is a public health agency under the Department of Health and Human Services. He said ATSDR's involvement in Superfund sites is funded under the same legislation which funds EPA's involvement in Superfund. He said when a site is listed on the National Priorities List, ATSDR works with EPA. He said the Sharon Steel site was listed in the mid-1990s, and ATSDR completed a public health assessment of the site in 1997. He said a copy of this document is in the repository in the Marion County Library.

Tom said he came to the meeting because EPA had mentioned to him that some people have expressed health concerns possibly related to the site. He said he is open to meeting with community members one-on-one, listening to and noting any concerns and taking them back to ATSDR headquarters to see what, if anything, needs to be done. Tom said he knows some people do not like to discuss health concerns in public and therefore offered to meet with people at the break in the meeting or after the meeting.

Roberta reviewed the agenda, and there were no additions. The minutes from the July and September meetings were approved as distributed.

## **Unfinished Business**

### Offsite Subcommittee Discussion

Roberta offered a process to follow during the discussion. It is as follows:

- Listen to a report from the Offsite Subcommittee
- Listen to and record concerns from panel members
- Listen to and record concerns from guests
- Listen to comments and questions from Exxon, EPA and WVDEP
- Identify a path forward

The panel agreed this would be the format for the discussion.

Ron Swope reported for the Offsite Subcommittee. He said the subcommittee decided it should host a public meeting with a direct invitation to the residents of the area. Ron said flyers inviting neighbors to come to the October 5 meeting were distributed to approximately 165 homes. He said five or six people came to the meeting and said the primary area of concern was possible health affects which could be related to the site. He said there were comments about numbers of people who have died of cancer.

Ron said the subcommittee passed out a sheet describing what the Offsite Subcommittee is and how the Fairmont Community Liaison Panel (FCLP) is involved with the site remediation. He said the handout contained the following question:

“Do you have concerns about potential hazardous material contamination to the properties surrounding but outside the property borders of this site? If so, please complete the form below and give or mail it to one of the Offsite Subcommittee members.”

Ron said the subcommittee received four responses. He distributed a handout containing those comments to the panel. [A copy is attached for those not present.] Ron said he received six more responses just prior to the meeting and those responses were not on the panel's handout. Daniel Jones, who gave the questionnaire to several neighbors, said he found numerous homes within one block on Suncrest Boulevard where someone either had cancer or had died of cancer.

Ron said although much of the concern about health effects is related to past activities, there also is a concern that houses may presently contain contamination in the form of particulates.

Robert Sapp said the subcommittee was very careful not to use leading questions when handing out material to homes. He said it was the goal of the subcommittee to objectively ask residents if there are any existing concerns regarding the site.

Karen Gribben said there is a concern in the community regarding the onsite landfills. She suggested this should be discussed at a meeting closer to the time when decisions regarding the landfills will be made.

In summary, the following community concerns were identified:

- Health Effects
  - Cancer concerns
    - breast cancer
    - brain tumors
    - leukemia
  - Respiratory problems
- Odors in water
- Property values
- Landfills
- Testing of property
- Particulates in attics and structure walls
- Air quality

Roberta asked guests if they had any concerns to add to the list. Daniel Jones said he has noticed an odor in his drinking water and asked if there was a way for contamination from the site to get into his water. Bruce McDaniel said the city water system is a closed system, and there is no way for outside contamination to get into the system. He said the city takes its water from the Tygart Valley River and any odors in the water would be caused by the source of the water or by the distribution system. He said if there is algae in the river, this may result in an odor. He said if there are old pipes, substances such as iron and manganese can build up on the inside of the pipes and then break loose and cause an odor in the water. He said both of these cases are aesthetic and not health related. He said sometimes old plumbing in houses, such as galvanized steel pipes, can contribute to odor problems.

Bruce said the city is preparing to start a water system improvement project to replace old lines. Bruce said any substance from any particular site would not contribute to odor problems in city drinking water. He said it would be easy to get a water sample from a home and test it so concerns can be alleviated, and he volunteered

to make arrangements to test water for anyone in the neighborhood. He asked Daniel for his address and phone number and said he would have someone from the city's system contact him to follow up for water testing.

A discussion followed regarding incidents of cancer in the area. Roberta asked community members what types of cancer have occurred and if there has been one prominent type. Residents said there have been all types of cancer in the community.

John Parks asked about the possibility of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) or the Atlanta Center for Disease Control doing an epidemiological study. Roberta said ATSDR also does this type of study. Tom Stukas said ATSDR will first listen to the concerns about cancer and find out what types of cancer have occurred in the area surrounding the site. He said a cancer survey would be the first step to see if the types of cancer found in the area are similar to the county, the state and the country as a whole. He said there is a lot of cancer in the country. He said one in three people would die of cancer. He also said cancer is age-dependant and occurs mostly in the older age groups. He said science has shown certain chemicals do cause certain cancers, and if there are many different types of cancers present, it would be difficult to relate those to a certain chemical or group of chemicals.

Daniel said it seemed to him that cancer is in an extremely large number of households in the area surrounding the site. Tom said he does not wish to lessen Daniel's concerns, but he has seen many areas in the country where cancer rates are high but not related to sites located in the area. Roberta asked if there is a cancer registry in West Virginia, and Tom said there is. Bea Hunter said from information she has read, West Virginia has a very high rate of cancer compared to the rest of the nation. She said this is due primarily to a high rate of smoking and the use of chewing tobacco in the state. She said her comments are not meant to discourage the activity of checking into the cancer rate in the area around the site, but it is well-known that West Virginia has a high rate of cancer due to an older population and high use of tobacco.

Bruce said he believes there is a need to obtain baseline information to compare the statistics for the area around the site to statistics on the county, state and national level. He said the question needs to be defined before an answer can be found. He said it seems from what residents say that there is a high rate of cancer in the area surrounding the site, but his father died of cancer, his sister now has cancer and he grew up in a different part of West Virginia.

Roberta asked the panel if it would be helpful to have someone from a state office come to a meeting and talk about the cancer rate in the West Virginia. Tom said initial steps have been taken by the regional office of ATSDR to look at the cancer rate in the area. He said ATSDR is trying to find a community similar to the community

surrounding the site to compare the two. He said ATSDR will continue the process of doing research on the issue.

Donna Jones asked if ATSDR will interview other residents in the area. Tom said the first step would be to look at the data and see if there is a trend of a certain cancer, or an elevated rate of a certain cancer. He noted most types of cancer take many years to develop.

Tom said the predominant contaminants on the site are known. He said if a high rate of cancer were to be found, research would be done to see what types of cancer, if any, these contaminants may cause. He said if there are cancers that are not related to substances onsite, it would be very difficult to determine what caused these cancers. He also pointed out there is more than one Superfund site in the area.

Donna and Daniel Jones said they have heard reports from older people in the community regarding substances coming from the Sharon Steel plant eating holes in aluminum siding and gutters, and stripping the paint off cars. Donna asked if the information regarding onsite contaminants is public information. Roberta said it has been presented at the panel meetings and is available in the repository. Donna asked if the information can be mailed to people who cannot leave their homes. Michael Cummings said the volume of information is extremely large and would be difficult to distribute.

Roberta asked panel members what their expectations are regarding dealing with the concerns of the community. Panel members offered their ideas of how concerns can be addressed. They are as follows:

- Obtaining baseline information regarding cancer incidence.
- Water testing.
- Offsite soil and particulate testing.
- Making public health assessment results available to neighbors.
- Making air monitoring information available. (It was noted there is no air monitoring being conducted at this time because there is no activity at the site.)

Roberta asked what was found when the initial health assessment report was written in 1997. Hilary said the report showed there was no health risk regarding contamination from the site in the soil. Tom said ATSDR made this determination based on the data that was presented to the agency. He said ATSDR does not conduct its own sampling, but data received from EPA showed levels of chemicals in the soil were so low that it was determined there was not a risk. In response to a question, Tom said the testing was done on residents' land adjacent to the breeze pile. Art presented a map of the site and pointed to this area.

Griff Fowler offered a statement regarding types of cancer and how they are caused. He said he worked for Sharon Steel for 40 years and worked with chemicals every day. He said he recently had been treated for skin cancer, and his wife had wondered if the condition was caused by his work. Griff said his doctor has confirmed the condition was the result of severe sunburn when he younger. He said he wanted to point out that cancer is caused by many different circumstances and cancer incidents may not be related to the site.

Roberta asked Exxon, EPA and WVDEP representatives to offer their thoughts regarding community concerns. Art said he appreciates the community's concerns regarding cancer because he has noticed similar concerns involving other sites around the country. He said when the panel was started, it was important for people to recognize the difference between what has been done onsite in the past and what is done now and in the future. He said that the health effects which have been brought up are due to exposures in the past, and nothing that is done now can change past exposures. He said when Exxon first took responsibility for the site, the company told residents the company could address current and future risks. He said most of the concerns he has heard at the meeting are associated with when the plant was active. He said what Exxon is working toward now is to make sure there is no current risk and no risk for future generations. Art said he hopes residents will see Exxon's commitment to this effort.

Art said the airborne particulate issue is also historical. He said this issue needs to be addressed, but Exxon's focus is on taking care of any contamination currently onsite and any contamination that could possibly migrate offsite. Art added that finding a way to get information to the public is important, but it is a difficult task due to the volume and scientific nature of the information.

Johh Hannig said he especially thanks the Offsite Subcommittee and the guests at the meeting for their hard work and valuable input into community concerns regarding the site. He said from what he has heard from the community, the cancer issue is the top concern of the residents living near the site. He said seeing the panel work out these concerns during this meeting has showed him how much the group has learned and grown over the past 18 months. He said he agrees with Art that the cancer issue is important to address and that it is a historic issue. John reviewed the goal for this project, which is to clean up the site safely, cost effectively and in a way that is protective of human health and the environment for the present and the future. John said now the process has come upon an issue which is historic, and it is important to deal with this issue while at the same time moving forward with the project so the property can be made safe and returned to productive use in the near future.

Hilary said he encourages anyone who has concerns to meet with Tom Stukas after the meeting to discuss these concerns on an individual basis.

Daniel Jones asked John if there are any plans to bring hazardous materials onsite and store them there in the future. John said no. Daniel asked Art if there is any contamination currently coming from the site. Art said the data collected over the past year indicates there are no contaminants migrating offsite. He said there is one exception where there is a seep at a ditch near the LOS area, and this area is now being studied.

Robert Sapp encouraged the guests who came to the meeting to continue to come to meetings. He said it may sometimes seem like things are not moving forward and questions are not immediately being answered, but with a little time these issues will be completely addressed at future meetings.

#### Project Update

John reviewed the project update handout. [A copy is attached for those not present.] He said field operations are scheduled to shut down in about two weeks and will not restart until after winter. He said the brick and concrete crushing is complete and equipment is now being moved offsite. He said the additional waste characterization work is complete and two new monitoring wells have been installed. John said these wells have been installed to better understand groundwater flow in one area of the site.

John informed the panel regarding work on a cave up the hill onsite. He said the shallow cave was filled in with rock and covered with dirt. John said Federal Investigative Associates (FIA) has already started providing security services at the site by making randomly scheduled visits to walk the property. He said this service will be especially important when field operations are halted for the winter. John said there is work to be done before field operations are shut down, such as repairing the fence where the backhoe had to pass through to work on the cave. He said a portion of the fence near an adjacent resident also needs to be repaired due to damage, which occurred when that resident's tree fell onto the fence during a recent storm. John said there is also work to be done on concrete substructures, which will require confined space entry work precautions.

John reviewed plans for the Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA) work plan and reports. John said there is continuing dialogue occurring with EPA, regarding one aspect of the EE/CA work plan and the Waste Management Area report. He said as a result, the timing for this EE/CA report has been delayed. He said two groups within the federal government, Fish and Wildlife and EPA's Biological Technical Assistance Group (BTAG), believe that wetland and terrestrial habitat exist on the site



and are potentially significant. As a result, they believe these areas should be preserved and/or mitigated [for example, be replaced by construction of wetlands in another area]. He said the site was formerly an industrial site with no terrestrial habitat or wetland areas present and these areas formed during a 20-year dormant period. He said Exxon believes that better management of waste material at the site takes priority over the need to preserve these short-term wetlands. He said some of these wetlands were created during the EPA's removal action from 1993-96. John said dealing with this issue will have an impact on timing of the release of the EE/CA report and possibly also on field work which is planned to begin in the spring of 2000. He said he hopes the issue will be resolved by the November meeting.

Hilary said he agreed with John and he expects the issue to be resolved by the November meeting. He said Melissa Whittington of EPA will be getting her office set up in San Francisco and she will have all reports and other documents with her. He said she will continue to be involved in the process and he will be her eyes and ears by coming to the FCLP meetings. He said EPA management wanted to wait to resolve the wetlands issue until after Melissa had her office set up. He said her office will be complete within a week, and he believes progress will be made soon thereafter.

Regarding redevelopment, John said the consultants working on the marketability of the site have talked with the West Virginia Development Office. He said the office reported that each year over 100 companies make inquiries with the office regarding level properties in the 40-50 acre range. Unfortunately, most of these companies locate elsewhere because of the lack of available sites. Most of the available sites in the region that compare with the Sharon Steel site are in the 10-15 acre range. John said the Sharon Steel site is approximately 100 acres in size and about half of the site is flat. He said in the past six months four companies had visited the Morgantown area, but had gone elsewhere because of the lack of flat land. He said it is encouraging to see there are companies looking for this kind of property.

John Parks asked if the panel will have a chance to see the EE/CA reports before work begins in the spring. John Hannig said the Waste Management Area EE/CA report will be presented to the panel when it is released and a copy will be made available at the Marion County Library repository. Karen Gribben asked if it would be possible to have a site tour to get a feel for where reference points are. After some discussion, it was agreed that Tom Bass of WVDEP will bring an aerial overlay to the November meeting to help panel members understand where items are located onsite.

Danny Jones asked if there is something found regarding offsite contamination, who would be responsible for cleaning it up. Roberta said the process must move one step at a time, and the first step is for Hilary to look into the issue of offsite testing.

### **Communication Update**

Panel members had no new information to report. Roberta said there have been no calls to the community information line.

Art offered additional information regarding the work on the cave onsite. He said after the last panel meeting he asked Griff Fowler about the cave and Griff said at one time Sharon Steel had run a pipeline into a cave onsite. Art said he is unsure whether or not the cave being worked on was the cave Griff referred to, because no pipeline was found when doing the work. Art said Sharon Steel pumped ammonium sulfate into a cave for a period of one day when the plant had some product left over after the ammonium sulfate market had a downturn. He said the company realized there was seepage occurring on the other side of the mountain and therefore halted the activity after not more than a day. He said the company then ran a pipe into the river to discharge the sulfate and this created a black precipitate in the river. He said upon realizing this, Sharon Steel halted the operation immediately. He said neither event lasted longer than one day. He said the substance released was not highly toxic.

Art presented additional information regarding activity at the site which Norma Watson recalled seeing years ago, after Sharon Steel closed the site and before the EPA removal action occurred. He said he did some investigation and with Griff's help found there was digging in the area referred to by Norma (where the breeze material was stored in a pile). He said some material had eroded away from the pile and machinery was used to move the breeze back to the pile. He said this work occurred in the late 1980s or early 1990s. He said Norma said the work she remembered seeing did not occur in this time frame, rather it occurred sometime between 1979 and the late 1980s between midnight and 6 a.m. He said he checked with EPA to see if the removal action did work in this area and if so, what was found. He said EPA tested material found in this area and found it to be non-toxic, therefore the material was not removed. He said both EPA and Exxon have done testing in this area and neither have found anything hazardous.

Art said John Watson remembered a strong odor occurring during work in this area in the early 1990s. Art said he asked the EPA's onsite coordinator during this time what happened and found EPA had broken a pipe that fed into the gas purifiers onsite. Art said this caused the odor John smelled. He said the EPA onsite coordinator confirmed there was a strong odor when the pipe was broken, and the coordinator personally went to residents of the neighborhood and apologized for the odor. Art said he feels confident these issues have been addressed and there is no reason for concern regarding these issues.

John Hannig said he appreciates questions being brought up at this point in the process and encouraged residents to bring up any questions or concerns through FCLP meetings, phone calls or e-mail messages. He said it may take time to answer some

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questions, but now is a good time to bring them up so there are no surprises later in the process.

## **New Business**

### FCLP Survey

Roberta reviewed the questionnaire given to community members on the panel. She asked panel members to complete the questionnaire about how the process is working and to offer opinions. She asked community members to send the completed survey to Ann Green Communications by October 22. She said she will compile the responses she receives and distribute them to the panel members before the November meeting, at which time there would be a discussion and planning session.

## **Next Meeting**

The next regular meeting will be November 4, 1999. The agenda will include a survey results discussion, planning for 2000, a project update and a communication update.

There was no further business, and the meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

**Next Meeting:            Thursday, November 4, 1999**  
**5 p.m. - Refreshments**  
**5:30 p.m. - Meeting**