

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

**TITLE:**

Help! Technical Assistance for Communities near Superfund and Hazardous Waste Cleanups

**SCRIPT:**

**Host:** Welcome to EPA Region 2's podcasts; a series of conversations about environmental issues in New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the seven Tribal Nations in those areas.

Today on the podcast, we're talking about EPA's Community Resource programs for people living near Superfund or Hazardous Waste Cleanup Sites. To talk about this, we're joined by Wanda Ayala and Dave Kluesner, two of EPA's Community Involvement Coordinators. Hi guys.

**Dave Kluesner (DK):** Hello.

**Wanda Ayala (WA):** Hi there.

**Host:** So, let's imagine I am a resident of a town with a nearby Superfund site. I don't know too much about the site, but I hear that there are public meetings going on and documents being put up for public comment. I hear that EPA wants to get input from me, a resident, about the cleanup effort at this site, but I'll be honest; this stuff is complicated. Beyond that, it's a LOT of material. I don't know what is meant by many of the terms and the plans, and sometimes simply the process is hard to follow; and frankly I don't have time to try and figure it all out on my own, but I want to be involved and to understand. Help!

**DK:** Don't panic yet. We understand what you're going through. It is confusing. It is a lot of material. But you don't have to go it alone. Do you belong to any community groups?

**Host:** Yes. I am a member of my neighborhood association, but most people there are in the same boat as I am.

**WA:** That's completely understandable. That's why EPA has programs designed specifically to help groups like your neighborhood association get the technical assistance they need to make sense of things pertaining to the Superfund cleanup at your site.

**Host:** Sounds good; what are they?

**DK:** Well there are two primary programs that are sponsored by EPA. The first is the "Technical Assistance Grant" Program; or TAG for short.

**WA:** And the second is the "Technical Assistance Services for Communities"; or TASC program.

**Host: Hmm. TAG, TASC. What's the difference?**

DK: TAG is a grant of \$50,000 that is awarded to help a group hire someone of their choosing to provide technical assistance to a group.

WA: While TASC services are provided by an EPA contractor, at this time, the firm Ecology and Economics, and there is no specific limit on the amount of assistance.

DK: TAG can only be used for National Priorities List (NPL) Superfund sites

WA: But, TASC can be used for NPL/Superfund Sites *as well as* other Hazardous waste cleanup actions like removal actions or cleanups administered under the "Resource Conservation and Recovery Act," or "RCRA."

DK: Finally, there can only be one TAG at a time, per Superfund site.

WA: ...But there *can* be more than two groups receiving TASC services, and there may be a group or groups receiving TASC services while yet another group holds the TAG.

**Host: Okay. Well, since I live near a Superfund site, both of these programs are theoretically available to me. How can these two programs help me and my neighborhood association?**

DK: I'll take TAG. TAG provides *money* so the group can hire someone to interpret and explain technical reports, site conditions, and EPA's proposed cleanup plans. The group is then responsible for sharing information with the community at large. The upshot of this is to build capacity of the group to provide input to EPA and to make decisions regarding their families.

WA: With TASC, This program provides services such as:

- Information Assistance:
  - develop and distribute fact sheets, brochures,
  - create maps
  - maintain a webpage
  - translation services
- Also, "Community Education"
  - Community Needs Assessment
  - Workshops and seminars
  - Training materials (videos and audiovisuals)
  - Just-In-Time coaching for upcoming public meetings or to help with participation in decision-making process
- Technical Expertise which means:
  - Review and summarize meetings, reports, and documents
  - Facilitate discussions between community members and other stakeholders

- Technical Assistance Needs Evaluation and Plan Development
  - To assist communities with needs evaluations
  - Develop technical assistance plans

**Host:** So, is my neighborhood association eligible to apply for *both* these programs?

DK: Well, the eligibility requirements are different for TAG than for TASC.

For TAG:

- Only groups can apply for these grants.
- Group members must live near and be potentially affected by the Superfund Site
- Groups must be representative of the community and be non-profit and be incorporated (or in the process of becoming incorporated)

So: Your neighborhood association, depending on its size and incorporation status may or may not be eligible for a TAG

WA: However it might be eligible for TASC. Any group that is looking to share the benefits of the support they receive through TASC with the rest of the affected community can request TASC services, as long as they live in or near the affected area.

**Host:** Can our local college apply for a TAG?

DK: No. Academic institutions are not eligible for TAG.

In fact, other groups that are not eligible for TAGs include:

- potentially responsible parties (also called PRPs), representatives of a PRP or groups that receive money or services from PRPs.
- Groups that are not incorporated for the specific purpose of representing affected people.
- Townships or municipalities (also called political subdivisions)
- Groups affiliated with a national organization that has direct or indirect control over your group are also not eligible.

**Host:** That seems like a lot of restrictions.

DK: For TAG, yes, there are more restrictions, although keep in mind, all those restrictions are geared towards making sure that public money is going to help the local community that actually needs it.

WA: And the good news is: TASC is much more open to groups that might feel shut out by the TAG process. If your group can identify a technical support need that isn't being met and that the community needs assistance with, chances are TASC might be able to help.

**Host:** Okay. Well right now, for the sake of argument, let's say my group decides to go the TAG route. How do we apply, and what's the selection process like?

DK: Well, first, the eligible group writes EPA what is called a “Letter of Intent.” This letter identifies your group and states that you intend to apply for the TAG for your particular site. EPA then informs the rest of the community of your group’s intentions through an advertisement in a local newspaper. The rest of the community then has 30 days to either:

- 1) Join with your group to cooperate on the TAG, or
- 2) Write their own letter of intent if they’d rather be considered separately for the TAG.

After that, each interested group has 30 days to complete their TAG applications.

**Host: If more than one group applies, how does EPA decide who gets the TAG?**

DK: That’s an important question. EPA’s preference is that groups work together if they can to form a cooperative coalition for the TAG. If that can’t happen, for whatever reason, EPA begins a selection process. During this time, EPA looks at each application individually for:

- Goals
- Plans for using the TAG money
- Concrete plans for how the group will share the information with the rest of the community for the good of the whole community.
- Workplan
- Budget
- Timeline and Existing resources.

**Host: So how long does it take from beginning to end for the TAG process?**

DK: All told, the TAG application process takes about 5 to 6 months from “Letter of Intent” to final award.

**Host: Hmm. Okay; one thing you said about TAGs that appealed to me was that my group gets to pick our own technical advisor? Is that right?**

DK: Yes, that’s true, with certain conditions. The technical advisor must have demonstrated knowledge of hazardous waste issues; college or university training in the relevant fields; and must be able to communicate technical information to your community. EPA will provide your group with a list of sources for where you can begin your search for a qualified technical advisor.

**Host: Let’s assume my group does end up getting a TAG grant, but no one in the group has experience with managing a budget of \$50,000. What can we do?**

DK: In addition to hiring technical assistance, money from the TAG grant can be used to hire a grant administrator to help manager and administer the grant. TAG money can also be used to:

- Purchase or rent office supplies to support the technical assistance service

- And to print newsletters or fact sheets to distribute information about the site, cleanup activities and opportunities for public input into decision-making.

**Host: Hmm. Some people in my group have been talking about taking the polluters of our particular site to court. Can we help pay for that with money from the TAG?**

DW: No. TAG money cannot be used for lawsuits or other legal actions. In fact, there is a whole list of things that TAG money cannot be used for. Among the restricted uses are:

- Political activity and lobbying
- Social activities or ceremonies like a yearly picnic for your group or an awards banquet for group members. Included in this are group members meals, transportation, lodging, rentals, tips, etc.
- Group members' training and travel
- Gathering new data such as sampling or well-drilling
- Reopening final EPA decisions
- Resolving disputes with EPA
- Health studies or epidemiological studies, which are studies of disease in a community.

Again, the reason behind all these restrictions is to protect the way that public money is spent.

**Host: But, if we hire our own independent technical advisor, how does EPA know how our group is spending the money?**

DK: EPA attaches several requirements to a TAG. In order to make sure that the TAG is being administered properly, the group has to:

- Keep detailed financial records showing how TAG funds and matching portions are used.
- The group has to ask EPA for reimbursement to pay your technical advisor on time and in full.
- Finally, the group must prepare and give quarterly progress reports to EPA; these reports detail spending and give evidence that the benefits of the TAG are being shared with the entire affected community.

**Host: Okay; I can see the value in the TAG program, especially if my group is used to working with grants, but still it seems like a lot to have to go through. I feel like I need technical assistance just to get to my technical assistance! What now?**

WA: I understand your confusion over TAG. Its worth considering that if you are a member of a group and if you recognize that your community is in need of a specific type of technical assistance service – let's say printing educational brochures to raise awareness about the Superfund or RCRA site in your neighborhood – you don't have go through the processes of applying for a TAG to get the job done. TASC is probably better suited to your needs.

**Host: That's great. Walk me through it: how do I get the TASC services?**

WA: In order to receive TASC services, you don't need to go through a formal application process like you do with TAG. Basically, with TASC, your group has a list of responsibilities. First, you need to submit a written request for assistance to the Regional Office. In Region 2's case, you would write to me, Wanda Ayala. In that request you talk about the specific technical assistance service that you are requesting help with. EPA then makes arrangements with our contractor, at this time the firm Ecology and Economics (or E<sup>2</sup>), to provide the service you have requested.

After that, your group is responsible for a few things, like:

- Attending and participating in meetings with the contractor
- Providing site background and current issues
- Helping to establish technical assistance project deadlines
- And reviewing contractor products.

**Host: Well, that sounds do-able. Why is TASC so much easier than TAG?**

WA: Mostly because the group is being given services directly, instead of money.

**Host: Is there a difference between the role of the TASC contractor and the technical advisor under TAG?**

WA: There can be. Unlike a TAG technical advisor, the TASC contractor may be used to learn and *represent* the interests of the community. The TASC contractor may also be instrumental in repairing broken trust or operating in a neutral facilitator role.

DK: Like the TAG technical advisor, the TASC contractor can also be used to facilitate or enhance the community's understanding of technical issues associated with the site.

**Host: Great. Well, I definitely feel like I have a better sense of what these two different programs are and how they can help both me and the community I live in. But, what's the takeaway? Give me one or two important things to leave this conversation with.**

DK: All right; TAG can only be used for Superfund Sites, whereas TASC can be used at all sorts of removal and contamination sites

WA: And while both programs are valuable, TASC can be more flexible and involves an easier process, especially for groups that have a specific need but don't have experience with grants.

**Host: Fantastic! And where can I go for more information about both of these programs?**

WA: For both programs, you can visit our community resources section on the web at [www.epa.gov/superfund/community/resources.htm](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/community/resources.htm). Or you can contact the Community Involvement Coordinator for your site, or contact Region 2's TASC Coordinator, me, Wanda Ayala.

**Host: Great! Well thank you so much everyone.**

DK: You're welcome.

WA: My pleasure.

**Host: Thanks for listening to EPA Region 2's podcast addressing environmental issues in New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. For more information, and to listen to more podcasts, visit [epa.gov/region2](http://epa.gov/region2).**