Taken from Swap Shop of Dow's Independent Facilitators, who met in Flint, Michigan, September 1993

1) Community Awareness

It was agreed that greater community awareness of the panel was a continuing challenge for all involved in the process; and that it would probably remain a challenge at least into the medium term future.

The facilitators felt that a valid panel *could* exist without any community knowledge, and still provide effective advice to a plant site as long as it was broadly representative of the community. This is obviously far from an ideal circumstance, but it serves to illustrate that although public awareness is an important factor, it is a separate factor from the effective operation of a community advisory panel.

That having been said, all groups are working on trying to raise the profile of public knowledge about the panel and its work. The following techniques were put forward as examples of how this question has been addressed at various sites.

- Printed word:
  - Newsletters from the panel to the community
  - Joint employee-community newsletters
  - Inserts in the local paper covering meetings (notices, abbreviated reports, annual progress reports)
  - Some were news releases, others paid announcements
  - Brochures - written by the panel
  - Advertising
  - Talking about the mission of the group and inviting people to contact panel members with their concerns and information requests

- Electronic media:
  - Advertisements and PSA's
  - Local talk show participation
  - Travelers' information channels
  - Public access channels - broadcast a meeting
  - Create a local call-in TV or radio show

- Live interaction:
  - Invite selected people to panel meetings as guests or as speakers
  - Hold a public meeting or an open meeting
  - CAP members speaking at local service clubs
  - Panel surveys of the community
  - Neighborhood action teams with fence line neighbors

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Some panels have established dedicated telephone call-in lines and post office boxes. Experience has been that, although there may well be important symbolic value in having and publicizing such an open channel, it is rarely used.

There was a discussion on the difficult topic of measuring community awareness and all felt there was much room for experimentation in this area. Participants were not comfortable that the scale generated through the CMA survey process was sufficiently sensitive to measure variations between companies and locations. Perhaps this is a fruitful topic for discussion at all CAPs over the next year, and certainly an opportunity to do some pilot projects on measuring success at different locations.

2) Evaluation:

All agreed upon the need for an appropriate evaluative mechanism, and the facilitators first deliberated on the nature of evaluation itself.

There are two types of evaluation described by Michael Scriven, an authority on evaluation techniques, as **formative** and **summative.** Formative evaluation consists of collecting various types of feedback information - both quantitative and qualitative - that helps improve the process. Summative evaluation determines the extent to which the ultimate objectives of the undertaking are met. It was felt that there was merit in pursuing both types, and that current evaluation processes in use tend to be more formative than summative in nature.

Facilitators felt that they had a good understanding of what was required both of them and of the process at the site level; but despite the mutual understanding evident at the local level, things became less clear in the context of the broader expectations of corporate management about CAPs. In order for effective summative evaluation to take place the corporate goals will need to be made more explicit.

Different plant sites have been working with a range of evaluation ideas; quantitative items like:

- Number meetings and hours of meetings
- Level of attendance
- Level of participation in discussion

and more qualitative questions such as:

- How was the community impacted by an incident?
- How representative are we?
- Has Dow taken our advice seriously?

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There was a feeling that the discipline provided by an annual review process helped in the crystallization of what should be measured and by whom. Some facilitators would like to have a third party participate in their evaluation process to make the process more objective. The person or team performing that task should have a range of experience in the field of facilitation and community advisory processes so that useful suggestions for improvement can be tendered and discussed.

A hierarchy of effectiveness was put forward as a starting point for the evaluation of CAPs, identifying five stages. It is recognized that only the first stage is easy to measure and that each of the others will require considerable thought and some experimentation before we can be sure that we have the process right.

The facilitators felt that there were three important cautions to consider in the evaluation of CAPs from a corporate point of view.

- Do not feel that the process has to be standardized over all sites. The evolution at the local level has been and will continue to be an important factor in meeting local needs.
- Beware of quantification: it has a place in the measurement of success, but panels are primarily a qualitative process. Be particularly wary of ranking.
- This is a young "technology" and there is much room for innovation, beware of stifling that creativity.

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