

FORMING A COMMUNITY ADVISORY PANEL

A community advisory panel should serve as a liaison between the community and plant, and create a constructive forum for the interchange of ideas and concerns about the plant and its operations.

But remember: any information shared with the panel is public knowledge and may be published in local media or used as testimony before regulatory bodies.

The following is a summary of the key steps to setting up a community advisory panel. These procedural guidelines were mostly taken from the CMA's Community Outreach guidebook, with input from how other Monsanto plants have started panels.

I. SET GOALS -- determine what you want to accomplish and identify possible limitations or obstacles before getting started. Think about the following:

- What will be the employee, community, and company expectations for the panel? What role will the panel play in the plant's operation?
- Develop preliminary organizational rules, such as how often the panel will meet (once/quarter?), how many members there will be (12-15?), how members will be chosen, how meetings will be run, will there be a chairperson or facilitator.
- Decide whether there are any issues that may be out of bounds for the panel (ie. company profits). Also determine what specific matters community input is needed on. Consider issues the community may wish to address.

II. RECRUIT PANELISTS -- make a list of the different groups which should be represented on the panel, and identify potential panelists from each. You should probably consider panelists from the following categories:

- plant's immediate neighbors
- local government leaders (the mayors, members of community councils, etc. of local townships)
- representative from a local environmentalist group
- local fire chief and other emergency response personnel
- principal or school board member from local school district
- local union president

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Responsible Care: 
A Public Commitment

DSW 137237

FORWARD

Member companies of the Chemical Manufacturers Association (CMA) are involved in a new initiative called Responsible Care: A Public Commitment. The initiative encourages CMA member companies to improve performance in response to public concerns. Two factors distinguish Responsible Care from other efforts to improve performance. First, CMA member companies must participate in Responsible Care as an obligation of membership in the association. And second, through a national Public Advisory Panel, the public is directly involved in developing the initiative. The national panel is composed of a group of informed and concerned citizens. Meeting 4-5 times a year, panelists review progress with the Responsible Care initiative and help the industry identify and develop programs and actions that address public concerns.

Responsible Care encourages facilities to communicate with local citizens, to listen to their concerns and to respond. Community Advisory Panels can serve as a mechanism for facilities to communicate with local citizens. CMA's Public Advisory Panel serves as a model for community advisory panels and demonstrates how the public and industry can work together to identify problems and develop effective solutions.

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INTRODUCTION

A community advisory panel serves as a liaison between a facility and its community. The panel can be a mechanism for the public to convey its questions, comments or concerns to the facility and for the facility to respond directly to its neighbors.

This booklet offers suggestions and resources for developing and implementing a community advisory panel. It is an accumulation of options based on the experience of others. Every community is different; therefore, every panel will be different. Consequently, the guide cannot address every aspect or anticipate every challenge in organizing a panel.

Why is community outreach important?

- Community outreach allows facility managers to hear what local citizens think and feel about issues that they share, including:

1. The possibility of a sudden release of dangerous material and what is being or should be done to prevent such an incident and protect people and property should an incident occur;
2. The potential for long-term health effects of living near or working in a facility that produces chemicals;
3. The cumulative effects on health and the environment that directly affect the quality of life now and for generations to come;
4. The cost of protecting health and environment as it relates to the economic impact on communities and companies; and
5. The social and economic impact of having a facility in your community.

- It helps citizens understand industry issues and better evaluate them in relation to their personal concerns.

- It helps industry leaders better understand citizens' concerns.
- It helps facility managers identify issues that concern local citizens but are not apparent.
- It offers facility managers a unique opportunity to explain the often complex issues associated with chemical production to lay people in a setting that fosters open and complete discussion.
- It provides an opportunity for dialogue between citizens and facility managers about future projects at the facility, such as a new production unit, landfill or incinerator.
- Most important, the panel helps build trust between companies and the communities in which they operate.

Is this a new idea?

The community advisory panel concept has been around for some time. Utility companies, long regulated, have encouraged citizen involvement in mutual issues as a way of building trust and knowing how to respond to the needs of their communities. Community advisory panels were active during the energy crisis of the late 1970s and early 1980s. With high demand and short supply, natural gas prices skyrocketed. Enlightened gas utilities encouraged citizen input about the crisis. Many panels worked closely with companies to resolve critical issues. Examples of panel activities include programs to insulate homes of the elderly and community-supported heat banks to help those who couldn't pay their heating bills.

Many community advisory panels exist today in the chemical industry. Examples are provided under the heading "Kinds of Panels."



Who can benefit from a panel?

- Any facility manager or community leader can open positive dialogue through a community advisory panel. Whether the facility is large or small, isolated, part of a large industrial park or in an urban area, people need to communicate, particularly where important and sometimes controversial issues are involved.

Are there any pitfalls?

- A community advisory panel is not a gimmick to cover otherwise bad relations between the community and the facility. It can, however, provide an opportunity to open dialogue and serve as a catalyst for beginning good relations.
- The panel concept should not be seen as the primary communications method from the facility to the community. The panel should not become a mouthpiece for the facility. If it does, the panel will lose credibility and effectiveness as a problem-solving mechanism.
- The facility manager faces a challenge in balancing the critical need for being open and honest and protecting confidential material. The facility manager must remember that whatever information is shared with the panel is public record and, therefore, may be published in the local newspaper or used in testimony before regulatory bodies.
- Successful panels require a great deal of work and dedication. Encouraging participation from the community, preparing information for the panel's use and review, and responding to members' questions all require time and resources.

- In addition to devoting time and allocating resources, facility managers who want to develop a community advisory panel should recognize the commitment to the public it represents. Once begun, the panel should have a life of its own to be useful to all parties. While there are a number of possible formats for the panels, all are predicated on the concept of an open exchange of ideas and views. The manager must be willing to give legitimacy to panel members' points of view.

John Kolackovsky, Plant Manager, Rohm Tech, Inc., Malden, Massachusetts:
"Before embarking on the development of a community advisory panel, you must have the complete support from your entire organization. The company can't use lip service. It must use its resources and work toward protecting the environment and satisfying the community's needs, as well as your own."

Evaluate Situation

Facility managers should have an ongoing process for determining and evaluating community attitudes and concerns. They should also have mechanisms to communicate with local citizens and periodically evaluate if the communications are effective. Examples of such mechanisms include public opinion surveys, focus groups, participation in town meetings or meeting with groups of citizens.

By using a community advisory panel, a facility manager can better communicate with the community and determine and evaluate its attitudes and concerns. For example, if a facility is planning a major project, a community advisory panel may help a facility manager gain the public's

HOW TO BEGIN A PANEL



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KINDS OF PANELS

understanding and acceptance necessary for the project to be implemented successfully.

Identify Resources

Facility managers interested in developing and sustaining a community advisory panel should have the necessary time and be willing to communicate openly with the community. A manager should determine if other organizations within the community can help organize and nurture a panel or if other chemical facilities will support a joint panel.

Select Panel Format

To help a facility manager determine which panel will best meet the needs of the facility and the community, the following section discusses different kinds of panels that have been successful.

Ad Hoc Community Advisory Panels

The ad hoc community advisory panel is a group of citizens invited to advise the facility periodically at the invitation of the facility manager. While it may be established for a long period, it generally is initiated for a specific project or to allow the facility management to evaluate the panel concept. Smaller facilities with limited resources may find the ad hoc panel the best first step. Particularly in a rural, well-defined geographic area, the ad hoc group may serve everyone's needs.

The ad hoc group works well when a facility is considering siting a hazardous waste disposal facility, adding a unit, planning a community open house or cleaning up a Superfund site. These situations present significant opportunities for two-way communications with the public and lend them-

selves to the ad hoc panel approach.

Case Study

Facility: W. R. Grace & Co.-Nashua,
New Hampshire

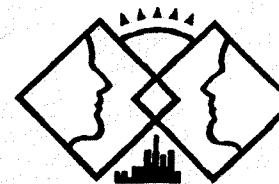
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In October 1989, W. R. Grace's Nashua facility announced the formation of a citizens advisory board. The advisory board will operate for at least one year to advise the facility during the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments (HSWA) permit (order) process and other such activities during that year. The advisory board formed because the public wanted more direct involvement with the Nashua facility at the EPA hearings on the HSWA permit.

The W. R. Grace facility invited a cross section of community citizens, emphasizing water board members and health care providers, to participate. Facility personnel, outside experts, research and printed material provide the community advisory board members with relevant technical information.

Jerry McCarthy:

"Grace is committed to establishing and maintaining open lines of communication with its neighbors and with those people who share an interest in protecting the Merrimack River watershed. We are very proud of the quality of work we perform at the facility, but



we are the first to admit that we need to better understand the concerns of our neighbors. We hope to achieve this goal by listening carefully to the advice and counsel of this group."

Company-Organized and -Supported Groups

For special long-term projects or for ongoing communications needs where the company wishes to continue a hands-on role in the panel, the company-organized panel works well. Any size facility or group of facilities, rural or urban, can initiate such a group. In the company-organized panel, the company invites the participants and remains at the center of its organization. Particularly in communities where resources are limited or interest is low, the company may need to take the lead in developing the panel.

While a company representative will convene the group, the group should elect a member of the panel to serve as leader. The company is also responsible for providing a preliminary agenda to guide discussion.

The challenge in company-organized panels is to allow participants to feel comfortable discussing whatever issues they want without feeling the company is controlling them. Even though the company is providing the structure and support for the group, real progress will come only through an open exchange.

Case Study

Facility: Rohm and Haas Kentucky

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In mid 1986, Rohm and Haas Kentucky was considering building a hazardous waste incinerator. In addition, the managers wanted to develop better communication with the local communities. This dual purpose led them to establish their advisory panel.

The panel was established as an ongoing outreach program with 18 panelists representing a diverse group of constituencies. The panel represents four local communities and includes education and medicine representatives and elected officials. The group decided to hold closed meetings and invites media or other visitors only on special occasions. The panel meets monthly. Each meeting begins with a buffet dinner. At Christmastime, the company hosts a special dinner for the group. While the members are not paid, as an incentive to increase attendance, the company donates to a charity of the panelist's choice if he or she attends 75 percent of the regularly scheduled meetings.

Team-building has played an important role in developing a successful panel at Rohm and Haas Kentucky. To better understand how an incinerator works, the company took the panel to Germany. This trip proved to be an excellent team-building experience and has led the group to be more willing to provide the company with candid responses to other issues.

Activities of the panel include helping the facility organize a community open house and developing a speakers bureau to increase communications between the facility and the community. The panel also recommended the

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kinds of improvements that the community most wanted to see after SARA Title III data was released.

Daniel Ash:

"The panel has been a very valuable process. We have reached the conclusion that the incinerator notwithstanding, we need the group. Our panelists are able to go back into the community and pass along some of the ideas and conversations they've had, get community reaction and provide feedback. The panel is an interactive group between us and whatever constituency group they represent."

Case Study

Facility: Rohm and Haas Delaware Valley

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The Rohm and Haas Delaware Valley facility established a community advisory committee in October 1986. A maximum of 20 members, invited by the company, participate. Panelists represent the governing bodies in local communities, residents, civic and community leaders, environmental interests, the clergy and includes an area high school student.

The panel meets regularly with managers of the Rohm and Haas Delaware Valley facility to review and discuss the facility's operation, environmental concerns, safety, emergency preparedness, the company's social commitments to the area and any other issues

the committee may decide are important. The committee provides feedback on the company's operations and suggests ways to improve communications with the community. It is an advisory group and not a decision-making body, and does not vote on any of the company's proposed actions.

The committee selects its own executive committee from which a chairman and vice-chairman are elected. Visitors are welcome to attend the meetings as observers only, provided they have notified the chairman in advance. The media are considered visitors.

The committee sets the agenda for its meetings and also has a post office box to receive correspondence directly from the public.

Brian McPeak:

"We've now been operating for over three years. It has been within the last 18 months that the committee has become a self-governing organization. It takes time and a lot of effort to get the various community interests to work together."

Case Study

Facility: Dow Chemical U.S.A.-Plaquemine

Contact: Tom Joffrion

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In April 1989, the Plaquemine facility invited 14 citizens representing five towns from two parishes (counties) to participate on a community advisory panel. The company appointed three of the panelists who then appointed



the remaining 11. All participants live within 15 miles from the facility and represent all demographic categories. Members asked the facility not to announce its formation until after the panel was fully organized.

Panel members wrote their own mission statement and modified and adopted guidelines that the facility had drafted.

A professional facilitator that Dow hired conducts the meetings, takes minutes and handles all paper work. The panel will decide how long to use the facilitator. Panel members must approve any visitors, including media, in advance.

Topics that the panel discusses include the environment, facility safety, company hiring practices, the facility's economic impact on the community, and ways the panel and the facility can improve the local education system.

Tom Joffrion:

"Our community advisory panel is a very powerful tool. Input from the panel has been given serious consideration by our company and has resulted in several policy changes in the operation of the Louisiana Division. For example, we have modified our purchasing policy to direct more business to the local community."

Case Study

Facility: Monsanto, Luling

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Monsanto's Luling facility established a community advisory panel whose objective is to identify and establish open dialogue on issues that arise because of the plant's presence.

The Luling Plant Advisory Panel is an 11-member group that was developed through a carefully structured plan. First, employees were told about the panel and were asked for suggestions for panelists who could represent all community and geographic constituencies. From these names, the facility chose a core group of five. They first met in December 1989 and selected six more members.

The facility has developed the panel's objectives and operating guidelines and hired a permanent outside facilitator to organize and run the meetings.

George Williamson:

"We know we must earn the right to operate from the public. We have been surprised by the willingness of community people to serve on the panel. They all seem to have a keen interest. This is no public relations gimmick."

Panels Initiated by Two or More Companies

Within many communities, two or more facilities may wish to organize a panel together. These groups often provide the facilities with an excellent source of information about the needs and concerns of the community while allowing the facilities to work collectively with the community to solve problems and pursue mutual goals.

Once established, the panel will decide its direction, meetings, agenda and leadership. While requiring fewer resources from each facility manager, the collective needs of all



the facilities are served before those of individual companies. Where several facilities are present in a community, citizen concerns may be best met through a cooperative panel.

Case Study

Organization: Deer Park, Texas,
Ad Hoc Advisory Panel

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The Houston, Texas, Ship Channel area contains 13 communities. 16 facilities initiated a cooperative advisory panel effort in Deer Park, a suburb of Houston with a population of 27,000.

A four-member facility manager's advisory committee, representing Rohm and Haas Texas, Shell, Oxychem and Lubrizol, selected six citizens to begin organizing an ad hoc advisory panel. The ad hoc group will eventually expand to approximately 25.

The initial objectives of the committee are to:

1. Provide feedback from the communities about facility operations and concerns;
2. Provide input to the communities from the facilities about facility operations and concerns;
3. Provide a mechanism for facilities to "test" ideas and plans before they are implemented;
4. Address community/industry issues

that are important to the community;

5. Provide a means to "educate" facility management about the community; and
6. Provide a means to "educate" community leadership about the facility.

Forty percent of the funding for the advisory group will come from the four companies that initiated the effort. The other 12 participating companies will fund the rest.

Members of the initial ad hoc group include the past chairperson of the area chamber of commerce and school board member (same individual), a school superintendent, a state representative, a senior citizen, the publisher of the local newspaper and the mayor of Deer Park.

Jack Coe:

"Our panel is moving forward rather rapidly. We focused on our specific community rather than the greater Ship Channel community. The initiative came through the East Harris County Manufacturers Association, which represents 70 plants. Our group of 16 facilities is concentrating on the concerns and interests of our community."

Independent Panels Established Through a Third Party

Some facilities may have access to resources that allow a third party to develop independent panels. For example, the League of Women Voters or other independent groups may be willing, even eager, to assist in establishing a community advisory panel for one facility or several facilities. Of all panel options, these panels provide the most open exchange of information because they are



run independent of the facility(ies). Panelists are more likely to convey the true feelings of the community, thus providing the best barometer of attitudes toward the company(ies). Industry may find that this option offers a broader forum for explaining its position and getting accurate feedback.

Obviously, the potential exists for creating an adversarial group. But the facility manager who approaches this kind of panel with a commitment to be open and direct will learn a great deal about the attitudes and concerns of the neighbors.

Case Study

Organization: National Institute for Chemical Studies

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In early 1985, West Virginia business and labor leaders, public officials, environmentalists and academics sought ways to reduce risks posed by chemical facility operations while preserving jobs and supporting continued economic growth. They founded the National Institute for Chemical Studies (NICS). NICS works with all parties as a bridging organization to assist in bringing about informed and open dialogue about chemical facility operations.

Because NICS is located in the heavy chemical manufacturing region of the Kanawha Valley, NICS has used the area as a testing ground for its concepts. One such concept is the formation of four community safety assessment

panels. Each panel is composed of citizens from specific geographic areas, managers of the chemical facility in that area and emergency responders. Media and others are welcome to attend all meetings.

NICS began the panels by inviting selected interested citizens and industry leaders from each area to attend a meeting to identify concerns they wanted to discuss in a neutral setting. NICS facilitated the initial meetings. Today, the groups operate independently of NICS, each with leadership that they chose. They are not limited in topics they discuss. The groups have addressed issues such as SARA Title III, health monitoring, emergency response capabilities, economic issues, safety procedures, and air and water emissions by local facilities.

Larry Bissett:

"In the two years since these groups have been meeting, the communications have moved from distributing information to active dialogue. It is rewarding to see the rapport which is developing as a result."

Case Study

Organization: League of Women Voters of Texas

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The League of Women Voters of Texas participated with several other organizations and industry to devise a strategy for risk communication that would serve all segments of the community.



STEP-BY-STEP ACTION PLAN

In mid-1986, representatives from the League, the Sierra Club, the Texas Health Department, local emergency responders and representatives from the Texas Chemical Council met. Their interest was to build consensus on addressing hazardous waste disposal issues.

The group's first commitment was to maintain its diverse membership. Group members agreed upon ground rules to ensure that each member had equal strength. They selected co-chairs, one representing industry and the other, public interest. The group explored the possibility of working toward mutual goals through consensus building.

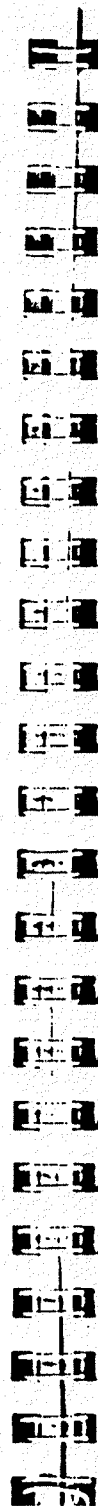
While not in the classic community advisory panel, the group established an ongoing committee of diversified and concerned parties that could address key environmental issues. The group has held two workshops that resulted in the development of Risk Communications Procedures for the State of Texas.

Diane Sheridan:

"Our experience shows that an independent third party can be very valuable in building consensus among diverse groups. Using an independent facilitator can avoid the pitfalls that can occur when people with widely differing viewpoints try to resolve differences alone."

Set Goals

The first step is to determine what you want to accomplish with your community and recognize any limitations before establishing the panel. Specifically, you should:



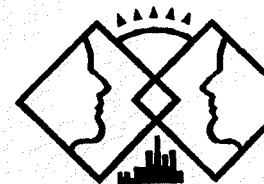
- *Determine your expectations for the panel.* What do you hope to accomplish? How long do you anticipate the panel to function? What role will the panelists have in your facility's operation? What are the panelists' expectations?
- *Develop preliminary organizational rules.* Create a simple framework on which panelists can build. How will panelists select a chairperson? Who will keep minutes and to whom will they be distributed? What rules of order will be followed? How often will the panel meet? How will new panelists be added?
- *Define parameters.* For example, you may not be willing to discuss product costs, profits or personnel matters. Also, have a clear picture of those issues about which you need input from the public. (Of course, your panelists will have their own interests to add to the agenda.)

You should discuss these goals with the panelists and be willing to incorporate their views into the panel structure.

Recruit Panelists

- *Develop a list of potential panelists.* You may want to develop categories from which you could select, for example, representatives from local townships or other governmental divisions, immediate neighbors, civic and community leaders, environmental activists, clergy, educators, students, senior citizens and medical providers.

Participants should represent a cross section of your community in terms of age, gender, occupation, education and attitude toward your facility and the chemical industry. It is important to include both supporters and critics so that you will receive broad input.



Good sources for participants include local schools, hospital auxiliaries, environmental and public interest groups, civic associations, church organizations and senior citizen centers. Your own employees should also be able to offer suggestions for participants.

Decide whether to include a media representative on your panel. Media pose a special challenge because reporters are always on duty. Everything said should be considered on the record. Also, having a reporter in the room may inhibit open dialogue. However, media are an important part of your community. Generally, the best approach is to welcome media representatives as participants and encourage them to be a part of the process.

If reporters or other visitors come to observe an advisory panel meeting, take the time to explain the purpose of the group, share the agenda and offer to answer any questions after the meeting. The key is to make reporters or visitors feel welcome without allowing them to be disruptive.

- *Make initial contact with prospective panelists.* The facility manager should either telephone or personally visit prospective panelists to discuss the advisory panel concept and determine their interest in participating. Prospective panelists need to understand at the outset that they will be serving without compensation. (To pay your panelists might compromise the integrity of the group.) Reimbursement of expenses, such as mileage, travel-related expenses, telephone charges and postage, is optional. Also, you could host a dinner every six months to thank your panelists for their efforts or make a donation to charity in their name.

Select a Facilitator

- *Identify a facilitator.* Once formed, the group may pick its own leader, but a neutral facilitator can ease the first meetings. The advisory panel is a diverse group of personalities with varying interests, and initially may not trust each other. A facilitator, however, can help the group pull together. Ask panelists if they want the facilitator to leave after a specific time (3-6 months) or to serve long-term.

The facilitator should be someone other than the facility manager so that the manager is free to interact with the group rather than be bogged down with rules of order, etc. Ideally, you should choose a trained facilitator from a research, public relations, or non-profit organization. Otherwise, the facilitator could be a clergy person, counselor or college professor.

The facilitator's role is to ensure that the meeting remains on the issue at hand and covers all the agenda items. He or she serves as a guide for the session and is responsible for drawing the entire group into an open discussion.

The facilitator must strike a balance between allowing each participant to comment or ask questions and allowing any one individual to dominate the meeting. It may be necessary for the facilitator to break in and defuse tensions if discussions become heated so that each side is allowed to speak.

Facilitators need to use a non-directive approach in conducting the session while ensuring that all necessary areas are discussed. They should never be identified with a particular viewpoint and should refrain from asking questions that are biased or would elicit biased responses from participants. The best results come



from open-ended questions that are ambiguous enough to allow for individual interpretation. The strength of the facilitator, however, comes from being able to follow up on ideas as they emerge from the discussion.

Plan Meeting Logistics

- *Identify a neutral location for the initial meeting.* Later meetings might include a tour of your facility, but for the first meeting a neutral location will be more comfortable for everyone. A church basement, community center or library may have appropriate space.
- *Schedule a meeting.* Once panelists have accepted the invitation to serve, schedule the first meeting. Select a date and time and plan the meeting for 1-2 hours.
- *Think carefully about the physical setting.* Just as the shape of the table is important to international government negotiators, so is the shape of the table important to making the most of your discussions. The ideal setting avoids a "head" of the table. Consider putting rectangle tables into a square if a large round table is not available.

Provide visual aids, such as flip charts and markers, so that the group's thoughts can be displayed for discussion. Refreshments and restroom facilities also need to be part of the physical setup. Have a reception table at the door and invite each panelist to wear a name tag. For the first meeting, write first names in large letters to facilitate introductions.

Final Preparations

- *Send a letter to panelists.* The facility manager should send panelists an invitation letter at least two weeks in advance of meetings. The letter should request panelists to notify the facility of their plans to attend by returning the enclosed self-

stamped card or by phoning. In the letter, give clear directions to the building and meeting room and ask if the facility needs to provide transportation. The letter should also ask panelists to be prepared to discuss the concerns of the group they represent. Make follow-up calls about five days prior to the meeting to those who have not responded.

- *Think about initial discussion topics and format.* While you should not approach the meeting with a rigid agenda, it may be helpful to know in advance topics you would like to discuss with the panel. Think about the following as you develop your preliminary agenda: What has the local media recently reported about your facility? Has the facility received any accolades for accident or emission reductions? How have recent environmental impact reports (SARA Title III) been received? What are the local concerns about other facilities? What accomplishments have you made in safety, health or economic benefits that should be shared? The agenda should include a time for you to explain the reason for the meeting and a brief (10-15 minute) "state-of-the-facility" message. Allow time for questions at the end of the discussion and plan for follow-up meetings.
- *Make reminder calls.* The day before or morning of the meeting, the facility manager should phone panelists to remind them of the panel meeting. This simple act can increase your attendance significantly.

Conducting Meetings

- *The first meeting can take many forms.* With a trained facilitator, you could conduct a focus group to identify interests and have a preview of how the panel might function. If you feel comfortable about the participants, you may want to consider a training session where panelists would



become immersed in the issues and get to know one another and facility management quickly. A social hour or dinner might enhance cooperation. The key to a successful first meeting is to begin team-building. The diverse group must quickly learn to work together while maintaining individual integrity.

- *Encourage the panel to develop its own mission statement.* The mission statement should set forth the panel's purpose and objectives. This may include what the community and the company expects to gain from the process.
- *With the panelists, agree on the ground rules for meetings.*
 1. How will minutes be handled?
 2. Who will be responsible for setting up future meetings?
 3. What discussion topics should the group pursue?
 4. Will media be invited?
 5. How many members should the panel try to maintain?
 6. What role does the panel have regarding the operation of the facility?
 7. Will outside resources be sought or encouraged?
 8. How will panelists be able to get information about facility operations?
 9. Who can speak for the group?
 10. What kind of decision-making will the group use? Consensus? Voting?
- *Develop leaders.* A critical element in the early stages of the advisory panel is the development of leadership. While the group should determine its leadership, you can help by offering options. The leader can

be a facilitator or a panelist. The leader can be rotated or remain constant depending on the anticipated longevity and dynamics of the group. Consider using a facilitator for several meetings to give the group more time to determine which panelist would make a good leader.

- *Keep a record of meetings.* Assign someone in the group or hire a stenographer to keep accurate minutes. Ask panelists if they would like to audio or videotape the meetings.

Once written, the minutes are to be mailed to each panelist. You may want to consider placing a copy with the local library or at another central place. You may wish to consider sending the minutes to local media also.

Special Challenges

- *A panelist attempts to dominate conversation.* Individuals with special interests or concerns may attempt to dominate the meetings. While you should give everyone the opportunity to express divergent opinions, allowing someone to disrupt the discussion is counterproductive.

During the initial meeting, a facilitator may be able to identify such individuals and encourage them to allow everyone the opportunity to speak. If at subsequent meetings the individuals clearly are making no effort to share and negotiate in a cooperative spirit, you may want to consider inviting them to speak with you separately to air their specific differences. In many groups, members will dissuade one member from obtrusive domination. Given time, this self-policing may effectively keep the panel on track.

- *Panelists lack enthusiasm.* When a group has been functioning in an advisory capac-



CONCLUSION

ity for some time, it may be difficult to sustain interest and attendance. To revive enthusiasm, consider bringing back the facilitator to uncover any hidden issues. If you haven't invited the panel to tour your facility, do so now.

While most panels deal with issues connected with a particular facility or group of facilities, discussing issues that affect the entire community, such as the homeless, drug abuse, and educational opportunities, can increase interest. While initially "off the subject," these topics may stimulate excellent ideas for programs that benefit the community and the facility.

- *Recognize a need for change in membership.* If specific panelists regularly miss meetings or the entire group lacks enthusiasm, consider changing the membership. Ask the current participants if they would like to leave the panel for a while and can suggest others who might like to participate. Also, go back to the initial organizational plan to find new names from which to choose. Each group will have a personality of its own. A change in membership likely will bring fresh perspective to the issues already discussed.
- *Recognize the need to dissolve the panel.* Ongoing panels should reassess its purpose 2-3 times a year. If the original objectives of the panel have been completed, it may be appropriate to disband the panel or allow it to meet on an ad hoc basis. This decision should be made with the panel and with the idea that should the need arise, the panel can reconvene.

The community advisory panel can be an excellent way to open dialogue with your community. It can allow the facility manager to learn more about the neighbors' atti-

chemical facility close by and provides an opportunity to explain goals face to face. It also can allow local citizens to have regular and direct input into industry.

The community advisory panel is not a panacea. It requires all parties to be dedicated, hardworking, open-minded and flexible. It increases accountability by all sectors. Once begun, it takes on a life of its own and is not easily discarded.

Even with these caveats, the advisory panel concept offers the opportunity for the facility to expand communications and work with the community toward mutual understanding, problem solving and trust building. Trust is not only hearing what another individual has to say but believing that information and acting on it as appropriate. Without trust, neither true understanding nor honest dialogue is possible.

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RESOURCES

