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SAFEGROUNDS: Community stakeholder involvement

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Preface

Although it is not part of the SAFEGROUNDS suite of guidance documents, this supporting paper by David Collier on *Community stakeholder involvement* has been available since 2002. It has been periodically refreshed to include references to new guidance and to reflect updates to existing guidance documents.

This most recent refresh has been carried out to keep the wording consistent with the recently revised land management guidance and to again update the further reading lists. Paragraphs on the role of NGOs and CBOs and on 'joint fact finding' have been strengthened and the text has been reordered in places but the main text is essentially as in the previous version.

Some out dated case studies have been removed. The intent is now that the paper should now complement the work of the SAFESPUR Learning Network, which has been set up to disseminate sector-specific and general good practice though presentation and discussion of case studies.

Draft 1 was prepared by David Collier, based on a previous review he carried out for the SAFEGROUNDS Project Steering Group (Collier, 2009).

This final issue includes CIRIA editorial comments on Draft 1, a new paragraph on joint fact finding, and additions to the *Further reading* list.

In memoriam

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Andy Thomas. As Chairman of SAFEGROUNDS since its formation in 1998, Andy was instrumental in fostering the collaborative and inclusive approach that led to the publication of several SAFEGROUNDS guidance documents. He will be sadly missed by the nuclear decommissioning community and others fortunate enough to have known and worked with him.

Executive summary

The SAFEGROUNDS guidance documents on good practice in the management of contaminated land on nuclear and defence sites are available at <**www.safegrounds.com**>.

They provide specific advice on engagement aims and objectives in context. This paper is not part of that guidance suite but rather offers a balanced, broad-scope primer for project teams on a range of key background issues which need to be appreciated when planning a stakeholder programme.

It was originally produced, and has subsequently been updated, in consultation with a range of stakeholders which make up the SAFEGROUNDS Project Steering Group. It complements the work of the SAFESPUR learning network which disseminates good practice though presentation and discussion of case studies.

The guidance starts with a discussion of the objectives of stakeholder involvement, the building of trust and how risk is understood in different contexts. A set of stages is then suggested for implementing a stakeholder involvement programme. This includes the practical issues of stakeholder selection, proposals for making the process useful and relevant to stakeholders so as to promote early involvement, and the level of involvement that may be appropriate in different circumstances.

A range of tools and techniques is introduced but SAFEGROUNDS does not publish guidance on the detailed practice of stakeholder involvement or risk communication, and it is not the purpose of this paper to summarise the wide variety of available material. A selection of useful references is provided in the *Further reading* section at the end.

Acronyms

BAT	Best available techniques
BPEO	Best practicable environmental option
CBO	Community-based organisation
JFF	Joint fact finding
NGO	Non-governmental organisation

Contents

1 The SAFEGROUNDS approach to stakeholder involvement

1.1 SAFEGROUNDS guidance

SAFEGROUNDS brings together a wide range of stakeholders, ranging from nuclear operators to anti-nuclear non-governmental organisations. Given goodwill and the building of trust, different perspectives need not be a barrier to working together to make lasting decisions and solving problems. Dialogue does not mean having to agree on everything.

This type of experience is now common throughout the civil and defence nuclear industry and there is a greater willingness to involve local communities and other stakeholders, as well as a greater willingness on the part of stakeholders to participate. Communities, regulators, and other stakeholders nowadays expect it but the real driving force is the shared desire for better decisions and approaches that can be implemented with community support.

Stakeholder involvement is therefore central to the SAFEGROUNDS approach. Key Principle 2 in the top level land management guidance (Towler *et al*, 2009) states that "site owners/ operators should involve stakeholders in the management of contaminated land particularly to inform decision making". Throughout, SAFEGROUNDS guidance emphasises the importance of:

- giving a wide range of stakeholders the opportunity to participate and allowing them to make the decision as to what they wish to be involved in, rather than restricting involvement arbitrarily;
- beginning early, to build relationships and allow stakeholders to help shape the work programme and the stakeholder involvement plan;
- allowing people to help frame the questions as well as helping answer them; and
- considering an ongoing programme of stakeholder involvement covering overall planning and the decision making process rather than separate involvement initiatives on individual projects.

Compliance with Key Principle 2 does not, of course, mean that all stakeholders have to be involved in all decision making steps for every contaminated land issue on every site. As discussed in more detail later, the aim is involvement that is proportionate to the technical and social significance of the contaminated land problem.

1.2 This paper

The SAFEGROUNDS guidance documents provide specific advice on engagement aims and objectives in context. This paper is not part of that guidance suite but rather offers a balanced, broad-scope primer for project teams on a range of key background issues which need to be appreciated when planning a stakeholder programme. It complements the work of the SAFESPUR learning network, which disseminates good practice though presentation and discussion of case studies.

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as to promote early involvement, and the level of involvement that may be appropriate in different circumstances.

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2 The Importance of trust

The public perception and response to risk is strongly affected by how a person judges a risk and how a person responds to a risk (discussed in the next section), and the protection of personal interests. But arguably the most important factor – more important than the use of any particular approach – is whether the individuals and groups involved trust the process being used and those making the decisions about a particular risk.

2.1 Trust in the process

The validity of external participation depends crucially on the integrity of those running it and their responsiveness. Contributions should be objectively considered and there should be a genuine willingness to take a different course of action if new information or insights are provided. If involvement comes after the options have effectively been narrowed down to one, it will be seen as a closed process and, at best, there will be no ownership. The consultation will be seen as a sham and simply a means of legitimising a prior decision.

The decision making process needs to be accepted as objective. Everyone usually understands that real life decision making means that a wide range of factors have to be taken into account and that that many of them are at least partly subjective and not easy to represent in (for instance) clear cost/benefit terms. However, a logical, transparent process which is clearly based on information of known provenance remains the objective.

Joint fact finding

Participation builds trust, and trust in information can be improved through 'joint fact finding' (JFF) where justified. In a joint fact finding process, the stakeholders work jointly to define the questions to be answered and select the experts to carry out the task. They then help set the terms of reference; monitor or participate in the work; and review and interpret the findings. JFF may not be quick or cheap, and is most likely to be invoked where there are strategic decisions to be made or high-profile arguments to resolve, but the result should be agreement on underpinning information at least, leaving the debate to focus on, for example, meaning and acceptability. The process also helps build shared understanding, and improves collaboration and mutual trust.

Joint fact finding is a methodology but it also reflects an underlying belief embedded in the SAFEGROUNDS process, which is that where practicable issues are best both raised and resolved collaboratively.

2.2 Trust in the organisation

Community involvement programmes are unlikely to be effective unless a degree of trust can first be established. Relationships with stakeholders and the public must be built up over time. It is not realistic to expect that the trust and credibility required for successful consultation will be established quickly, especially where the project is contentious and the debate polarised from the start.

Acceptable motives, realistic strategies and effective regulation are prerequisites for building trust, but perhaps the most important factor is openness. An open culture within the organisation is the ideal. Practical examples of openness in the context of a community involvement programme include: admitting mistakes, acknowledging uncertainty, and giving people the full picture.

Reliability is another important contributor to trust. That is, the confidence that the sponsoring organisation and the individuals working within it will do what they say they will do and that commitments made will endure, even if the owner/operator's staff changes. Not only should the organisation be open and honest, but it should also be efficient and competent so that its promises mean something. Poor reliability can easily grow into a more general lack of trust.

2.3 Credibility

The credibility of someone talking about risk depends only in part on his or her technical competence. It is also strongly influenced by how committed they appear to be to stakeholder involvement, whether they understand and are sympathetic to the concerns being expressed, and whether their manner is open, honest and direct.

Independence and objectivity are also important considerations. Information from "biased" sources will tend to be distrusted, particularly where the organisation's motives are primarily commercial or political. People place most weight on information that is clearly neutral and addresses all sides of the argument. For instance, independent peer review of the important subjective judgements underpinning the analysis may need to be carried out to underpin a comparison of options for a controversial project.

3 Risk communication

Although much is known about the differences between the way technical specialists and communities think about risk, communications between the two can still be fraught with difficulty and so the basics are summarised below.

3.1 Risk perception

It is now recognised that a "top-down" model of risk communication is unlikely to resolve a wide range of environmental risk controversies. As a result, involvement with the public is no longer seen as an "optional add on". This shift has seen risk communication and policy practice move toward two-way dialogue between "experts" and the "community" where before the emphasis was on "explain and listen".

Any stakeholder programme therefore has to deal with risk perception and acceptability factors in an open and straightforward way if participants are to see it as addressing their concerns, which must never be dismissed as "unscientific".

Even allowing for the various biases that are at work in risk perception – such as the tendency to consider widely-reported events to be more likely than they really are – the general public's ability to rank frequency of death from hazards is often not unrealistic. Where communities sometimes part company from industry risk assessments is that they factor in "quality" of hazard, eg dread, familiarity and catastrophic potential. It is not irrational to fear some forms of death more than others, or to be cautious of the unknown or the uncertain.

Just as experts do, members of the public have a mental model of the links between hazards and disease which includes beliefs about how these risks can and cannot be controlled. If communication does not address people's existing causal models, they will adapt the information that they hear to what they already believe. People's thinking cannot be changed about risks or hazardous processes without looking at their prior beliefs (Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Nor can their perceptions of uncertainty be ignored. No decision is made with the befit of total knowledge; the only question is the extent and nature of the shortfall. All decision making is thus decision making under conditions of uncertainty, and any communication concerning decisions also concerns uncertainty. It is only ever a matter of degree.

Most audiences can understand different types of uncertainty from their everyday life, including variability, even if probabilistic data often proves problematic. However, to gain acceptance of something that is uncertain requires much more than simply telling people how big the uncertainty is. Uncertainty has to be discussed in a holistic risk management context and never just presented as a matter of statistics. People also need to be convinced that the analysis is realistic and has not missed anything significant. And looking to the future, what confidence can people have that uncertainly will be managed, assumptions validated, and tough action taken if necessary?

3.2 Risk acceptance

It is a mistake to confuse people's understanding of a risk with their acceptance of it. The level of acceptable risk is a matter of values and opinions. Any evaluation of options is therefore likely to have to explicitly incorporate underlying values and social factors such as fairness and the balance of benefit and risk. Steps that result in a fairer and more voluntary distribution of risk will be helpful.

A feeling that the things that can sensibly be done to reduce the risk have been done, and that there are effective monitoring and emergency response arrangements, is important to acceptability. Communities tend to look for independent monitoring and open reporting of results, plus other indications that adverse findings will not be concealed, so that if things do not turn out as predicted, action will be taken. They also look for a design that allows for a change of plan if the unexpected happens, and the potential for effective countermeasures should there be a failure.

Motive is very important, and the corporate values of the sponsoring organisation will make a difference. It matters who stands to gain from a project, and whether they 'deserve' that benefit. For example, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the public will tolerate certain types of risks if there is sufficient medical benefit but not if the only benefit is a corporation's 'bottom line'.

It is not irrational for a community to be more willing to accept one risk from a company whose corporate values and motives are respected and reject a lesser risk that feels "exploitative". Past corporate values and behaviour also provide as good a guide as any to the way the organisation will respond if the level of risk turns out to be higher than expected.

3.3 How communities link issues

The public rarely see decisions as independent of the wider context. They inevitably perceive decisions that form part of a wider programme, such as site restoration, as being linked and if they cannot see the wider picture they will be likely to feel either mistrust or frustration – probably both. An involvement process will therefore really be successful only if the participants fully understand the context, eg how a decision on one element of a wider plan fits together, with decisions on other elements and on the overall framework. Participants need to be aware if proposals may be overturned or modified at a later stage or if other bodies (eg regulators) might initiate their own separate consultation. Communities link issues and decisions that seem separate to industry and regulators. Also, people often see little distinction between policy and its implementation.

Members of the public usually wish to make their views known on the overall merits of the project and of alternatives but are rarely in a position to make much contribution on the technical development of the proposal. Thus a programme that aims to involve members of the public by allowing them to comment only on technical detail will frustrate them. They frequently want to be heard on matters that concern them but that are ostensibly outside the formal scope of the consultation and may well also be outside the scope of the project team's decision making. Exclusion and abrupt rejection of comment as "outside the scope of what we are here to discuss" is liable to provoke an angry reaction. Some flexibility is therefore required, and there needs to be a mechanism for passing on such comments and obtaining a response.

Many environmental debates actually represent conflicts over competing social values as well as disagreements over scientific and economic data. The public and wider stakeholder community provide a social peer review function. This is comparable with the technical peer review that is the usual consultation objective but these represent different sorts of processes. They require different, perhaps parallel, approaches. Some of the difficulties in consultations are a result of attempting to stretch mechanisms and information provision designed for technical consultation to accommodate a different type of stakeholder input.

There is also the challenge of integrating the technical, social and local democratic inputs. Unless the decision making process is tailored to accommodate all three types of input, and agreed before the process starts, the hard-won social input from the general public may simply be put to one side.

3.4 Guidance on trust and risk communication

SAFEGROUNDS does not publish guidance on the detailed practice of risk communication and it is not the purpose of this paper to summarise the wide variety of available material. A selection of useful references is provided in the *Further reading* section at the end. The SNIFFER guidance on communicating understanding of contaminated land risk is particularly relevant, while the books by Paul Slovic and colleagues are a good starting point for those wanting a more in-depth understanding.

4 Some comments on cost/benefit issues

The treatment of cost/benefit issues as part of stakeholder events is the subject of considerable debate within the nuclear industry, amongst campaign groups and within the professional stakeholder involvement community. It is clearly a matter of huge importance in decision making, but uncertainty about how to deal with the potential for conflicting approaches and conflict between cost/benefit and other principles means that it is sometimes not dealt with transparently.

Some may fear that economics will have too dominant a role, others that large sums will be wasted to no good purpose. In part, this may be linked to different perceptions of the level of risk from radioactive materials, but it is much more complex than that and there are varied views about how to decide what to spend. Some seem to reject cost/benefit and "value of life" calculations on principle, or because they suspect manipulation, others see them as the only rational way to allocate resources. Most people fall somewhere in between.

What would be of concern is if, out of concern to avoid difficult debate, the financial basis of the decision making were not properly explained or open to discussion. If one is seeking input at the values and principles level, or even to some extent looking at weightings, participants do not really have to come to terms with the practical implications of the costs. This is perfectly understandable – desirable even, because it confuses the messages. However, if the sponsor is seeking deeper stakeholder involvement in the decision making process cost/benefit issues have to be addressed in a more sophisticated way.

Clearly, site owner/operators and the nation do not have an endless supply of money, and if very large sums are spent reducing minimal risks in one place they are probably not available to reduce much larger risks in another. People do understand this – it is after all their everyday experience of life – but there are no easy answers and it takes careful process design and facilitation to maintain constructive involvement and allow people to participate in discussions on cost/benefit issues in a way that recognises the strong link with issues of values and trust, but without letting those links dominate unduly.

5 Planning a programme

5.1 General

Sponsors must be clear and honest with themselves as well as with the prospective participants about the reasons for involving them, freely offering opportunities for involvement but focusing on getting active and representative participation at key points, which may be earlier or at a more strategic level than has generally been the case up to now. They should not push for "broad involvement" simply for the sake of it, or design stakeholder programmes with "one of everything" because they are not clear what type of process they and the participants really need. Sponsors need to consider whether they can build on existing day-to-day dialogue or on other involvement activities being carried out by the same or other parts of the organisation.

Beginning involvement early in the process is important as this allows people to have a legitimate opportunity to help frame the questions to be addressed, as well as to participate, and to influence the outcome. Other advantages of early involvement include: not wasting time in carrying out technical work on options that most stakeholders will never accept (or conversely time spent proving what would be accepted as a given), shorter formal public consultation processes, and shorter regulatory approval procedures.

At the other end of the process, it is important to provide feedback to participants so they can see if and how their input was taken into account, and to follow through on commitments made, eg about monitoring and reporting, back to the community.

Involvement of stakeholders throughout a cycle of planning and decision making is more effective than separate consultations on a number of issues. It should not simply be when a particular project is in the late stages of planning or implementation, but at the outset. At sites where management of contaminated land will continue over many months, years, or even decades, means should be established to involve stakeholders throughout this period and at the different levels of land management. This will enable stakeholders to maintain a holistic perspective as well as focusing on the more detailed elements.

5.2 Key stages

A structured process planning cycle makes sure that the right people are involved in the right way, at the right time in the decision making process. It also helps site owner/operators deliver involvement programmes reliably and cost-effectively. The key stages in planning and implementing a typical stakeholder involvement programme are therefore outlined below. Each programme is however unique and needs to be tailored for its purpose and its audience. In general, the larger the scope and reach, the better defined and more formal the stages will be. In a smaller consultation they may be implicit or merged together.

There may well be a parallel communications plan, to explain the issues and inform the wider community – and of course gain credit for good practice – but that is outside the scope of this paper.

1 Define the purpose – what is the scope and purpose; how does it fit in with wider decision making and other initiatives; which stakeholders should be involved, what their particular needs are, and what their potential contributions might be.

2 Plan the programme – what mix of activities is required; where can existing mechanisms be used; how should the programme be promoted; what documentation needs to be prepared; who should be allocated to the programme project team; what resources and

training do they need; are internal workshops required first; how will the programme be evaluated; is the budget agreed.

3 Review the plan – inform community of proposals; review the scope and design of the programme with some of those likely to be involved; test examples of any promotional and information material; consider accessibility for those reliant on public transport. Failing to show willing to inform and involve widely may compromise all the subsequent steps.

4 Promote the programme – launch the programme; make media announcements if required; inform internal and external stakeholders; encourage and facilitate involvement by individuals and groups in the community; start stakeholder registration database; set out details of access to information and any outreach events; allow time for groups and individuals to spread the word about planned meetings.

5 Provide information – disseminate and make available key documents; organise poster displays, site visits, presentations to community groups, as required; if deemed necessary, set up library for participants, website with supporting information, telephone help lines.

6 Consult – consult interested stakeholders; provide various means to comment; acknowledge and record comments; consider interactive outreach activities such as public meetings and 'surgeries', and use of face to face/telephone/online surveys or questionnaires to canvas opinions.

7 Participate – if appropriate, consider meetings and facilitated events such as meetings, workshops and focus groups to explore specific issues in more depth; consider joint problem solving and group decision making methodologies or deliberative methods such as citizens' juries; discuss proposed events with potential participants.

8 Extend participation – if appropriate, involve community liaison groups; consider possibilities for joint working parties and 'neutral' data gathering or monitoring.

9 Collate responses – assess comments and outputs from participative events; seek further clarification or new analysis as necessary; document process.

10 Decide – document the decision process and share final decision logic as appropriate.

11 Feedback – provide feedback to participants on comments received and how they were taken into account, decision made, next steps etc. Inform stakeholders not directly involved in this specific programme.

12 Evaluate – seek the views of participants; incorporate the lessons in internal guidelines; feedback to stakeholders.

In some contexts, stakeholder involvement programmes have to meet specific regulatory requirements; in connection with major planning applications for instance (see CLG, 2009). These are not, however, covered in the current paper.

6 Selecting stakeholders

Stakeholders are constituencies, organised groups or individuals that have a direct or indirect interest in the management of the contaminated land. They include 'institutional' stakeholders, such as regulators, local and national government, and others who could be affected by, or have a direct interest in, land management decisions, such as employees, local residents, community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Key individuals within the owner's/operator's organisation will also be involved as stakeholders.

The focus of this paper is the local community, but other types of stakeholder also need to be involved if the external input to decision making is not to be dominated by one perspective or set of interests. Stakeholders are much less likely to respond constructively in future if they feel unfairly excluded.

The stakeholders and stakeholder groups whose support for the project will help it go ahead smoothly and those whose opposition will delay the project, obstruct it, or reduce its viability should certainly be included. Those who may be, or would think they may be, affected by the project, their representatives and the site local liaison group should also be included.

The particular issue and management options under consideration and analysis of who within the community and wider area might be directly or indirectly affected (or believe they might be affected) will suggest interests that need to be included, eg tourism, fishermen, farmers, Women's Institute etc.

Beyond that, programmes may look to include people and groups influential in the area, those with an interest in a particular outcome and also stakeholders that have been involved in the issue in the past. However, in doing this, it generally also pays to think a little more deeply about the different types of stakeholder.

Internal or external stakeholders that have a reasonable degree of commonality of interest with the organisation in question are the most obvious category. However, there are other classes of stakeholder that are affected by the decisions an organisation takes or have a strong view on its conduct, even if their interests are very different.

Organisations require a "licence to operate" from a wider range of stakeholders. This is obvious in the case of regulators such as health and safety or environment protection bodies, where authority has been delegated by society. The right of shareholders to regulate the direction of a business is also readily appreciated. In practice however, organisations find that their "licence to operate" can also be compromised or even withdrawn because they have lost the consent of the local community in which they operate, or they have lost the confidence of politicians and financiers.

Campaign groups often see themselves as having a "license to operate" or watchdog role, but they are also often significant as opinion formers able to influence other stakeholders. Failure to inform a local community of the existence of other groups with experience of similar issues or a national NGO with relevant expertise may undermine trust and waste time later on. The media may have considerable influence on other stakeholders and may also be seen in turn as an indicator of a broader, otherwise unobserved, public mood. They are sometimes considered to be stakeholders, but are more often considered separately with other opinion formers, on the basis that there is usually no strong commonality of interest.

An important issue in some projects will the transport of radioactive waste. This is likely to prove an emotive topic and accordingly needs to be handled with great care. Communities

along the proposed transport route may need to be informed and invited to participate. Some would go further, and say that they should always be invited. Certainly, communities at the 'receiving end' should be involved if there is any significant change to existing arrangements.

In summary, a community cannot therefore be treated as a single entity. Relationships between the site and the community are complex and all the different types of stakeholder described above are contained within it. The people who live around the site and the community groups, and local authorities that speak for them, have a wide range of inter-relationships and perspectives. In reality, there is no such a thing as "the community view" and this has to be born in mind in reading the sections that follow.

7 Proportionality

SAFEGROUNDS recognises that stakeholder involvement has both financial and other resource costs, both for the sponsoring organisation and for stakeholders. This may be particularly so for members of the community who sometimes give up very substantial amounts of their own time and participate in decision making and consultation exercises. SAFEGROUNDS therefore also emphasises what it refers to as "proportionality".

Compliance with Principle 2 does not mean that all stakeholders have to be involved in all decision making steps for every contaminated land issue on every site. Each situation is different, and the history, local situation and wider context will affect the appropriate scale and scope of involvement and the techniques used. However, the extent of consultation and involvement should still be proportionate to the technical and societal significance of the decision – recognising that opinions of significance may differ.

The principle of proportionality suggests that where there is significant potential off-site impact or interest in a contaminated land management decision, the views of a wider range of external stakeholders should always be sought before a preferred option is selected and submitted for regulatory approval. The emphasis for smaller projects may be on information provision and consultation may be limited to the local community. There will also be contamination issues that have little or no significance for stakeholders and where quick action is a priority, for instance clean up of a small spillage. It may then be appropriate simply to include it in routine reports to the local community liaison/site stakeholder group. SAFEGROUNDS states that the presumption in case of doubt should be to invite involvement – stakeholders have limited time available and can generally be trusted to respond appropriately.

The principle of proportionality also applies in gauging the appropriate level of involvement. Seeking comments on a simple consultation document may suffice on many occasions, but more complex or controversial issues will usually need a greater degree of interaction.

The application of structured multi-attribute decision making methods and best practicable environmental option/best available technologies (BPEO/BAT) processes is a major theme in the SAFEGROUNDS guidance. New guidance is available on the implementation of BAT in the radioactive waste context was published to support the introduction of the Environmental Permitting Regulations in England and Wales which also discusses the involvement of stakeholders (Nuclear Industry Safety Directors' Forum, 2010). The degree to which external stakeholders are brought into the process and the balance between local, regional and national involvement again depends on the potential impact and significance of the project.

8 Involving the community

8.1 Reaching target groups

People and organisations in the community need to be quite strongly motivated to participate in consultation or decision making. It takes a great deal of time and effort – often unpaid – and it can be an intimidating experience for non-technical members of the community. The successful involvement programmes are those that are "stakeholder friendly", designed to improve the benefits people get from participation and lower the barriers to involvement (see Table 8.1). The relevance of the programme to them personally is explained, they feel that they have something useful to contribute, and they feel that their involvement has the potential to affect the course of the decision making process in a meaningful way.

Consultation on safety, environment and the introduction of new technology has historically tended to be dominated by institutional stakeholders and pressure groups. There are good reasons for this. Such organisations are usually equipped to provide technical comment at a level the sponsors of the programme will find useful, and they understand the decision making and regulatory process.

In contrast, members of the public usually wish to make their views known on the overall merits of a project or course of action. Only rarely can they make much contribution to the technical debate unless local issues are involved. However, sponsors are nowadays increasingly carrying out broad-based public consultation and making more effort to reach 'ordinary people' and factor their views into the decision. Lay members of the public are also capable of making reasoned and reasonable contributions and their involvement is often particularly important in contaminated land projects.

Members of the public also increasingly feel that they have a right to information and to be consulted on a wide variety of issues. One consequence of the growing recognition of the benefits and importance of consulting the general public is the wide variety of approaches and facilitated workshop techniques that have been developed specially for this purpose. Only those with strong prior views tend to respond readily to opportunities for participation, so active measures generally need to be taken to recruit a more representative cross-section.

Local community liaison groups or site stakeholder groups offer one channel of communication. Their role is generally to facilitate communication and consultation between 'their' sites and the wider community, rather than themselves to provide one 'community view'. Many relevant stakeholders will be represented on them, but not all. For instance, programmes seeking the views of local or national pressure groups will normally have to do it directly (see Section 9).

All consultations struggle to reach those without strong views, and some parts of the community are particularly hard to reach (eg young people and minority groups). Where legitimacy requires that the community as a whole be consulted or involved, local authorities need to be consulted and then specific efforts will be needed to reach them. For instance, although focus groups have their limitations, they have been used successfully (sometimes with paid participants) to gain insights. On those relatively rare occasions that the true balance of views across the whole community needs to be determined, independent opinion research may be required.

Where there is less experience of involvement, there may need to be an initial capacity-building stage to strengthen and provide resources to community institutions to allow them to participate fully. If people are being asked to participate in decision making, time may need

to be spent to bring them up to speed on the issues – ideally using briefings from a "neutral" source. The pool of individuals who understand group decision making processes and are equipped to participate in future will be enlarged with each consultation.

Table 8.1 *Making involvement programmes stakeholder friendly*

Issue	Points to note
Competing demands	It takes time and commitment to participate properly, and there are many competing demands. Try to make participation as easy as possible.
Access	Carefully consider access to consultation documents and outreach events. Take into account the needs of the disabled.
Time	Aim to allow sufficient time within the programme for participants to prepare for events and to read and comment on documents.
Awareness	People have to be aware of the programme to participate. Think about informing and encouraging people through a co-ordinated promotion campaign.
Information	Try to present a range of information, taking account of the format and level of detail required by different participants.
Public speaking	The stress of speaking in a meeting deters many from participating. Surgeries and exhibitions are more flexible and less intimidating.
Internet	The internet gives people access to a wide range of information and access to the internet opinions from all sides of the argument. But not everybody has access, so a website on its own is not enough.

8.2 Campaign and community groups

Although these issues need to be dealt with sensitively, it is clear that campaign and community groups often have an important role to play and may provide the 'constructive challenge' necessary for legitimacy. More specifically, the participation of campaign and community groups is important to an effective and credible programme for both practical and democratic reasons.

- they can help develop the format of a stakeholder involvement programme on the basis of their experience, and provide feedback during it
- some pressure groups can provide critical scrutiny of documentation and make a technical contribution to participatory decision making
- consultation with pressure groups gives their supporters – who may include a significant proportion of the people taking an active interest in the project – an organised channel for expressing their views
- it is fair to assume that the pressure groups represent their membership directly, but not the general public. They are, however, one channel by which evidence of public opinion might be communicated
- even their critics usually recognise that their involvement is an important safeguard and has been shown to give the wider community more confidence in the process.

Different groups have different approaches, make different judgements on the same information, and may have very different long-term agendas. However they probably have one thing in common – there are too many different calls on their scarce technical resources. They therefore need to be convinced that the issue is relevant and that they can have an impact and as far as possible, consultations should be co-ordinated to keep the demands on participating stakeholders to a reasonable level.

Where subject matter and/or the documentation is complex, where there is little authoritative third party analysis in the public domain, and where community involvement has a high priority the case for providing reasonable levels of financial or other support could be considered. Local campaign or community groups in particular may need practical support, a contribution to expenses, and help in securing access to independent sources of information and advice.

Pressure groups have the right to choose whether to participate in a community involvement programme. Even if there were no resource constraints, pressure groups may not want to be involved because they believe that they can more effectively make their arguments outside the formal process, or because they fear appearing to legitimise the decision making process, and hence the eventual decision, though participation.

Owner/operators would generally recognise this argument, but their case for NGO/CBO involvement would be that structured programmes are often a means to exert genuine influence if the scope is acceptable, and may well offer NGOs/CBOs useful opportunities to explain their views (which are often misunderstood and sometimes misrepresented) directly to key stakeholders.

Protest may be legitimate, and non-disruptive protest is not uncommon at (for instance) public meetings, but if NGOs/CBOs do choose to participate, it does arguably imply acceptance of certain responsibilities as it does for any other participant. For instance, in the NGO/CBO case to separate protest from participation so far as practicable, and to recognise the difficulties inherent in any programme and help avoid problems rather than exploit them unfairly.

9 Level of involvement

9.1 Range of levels

At its simplest, stakeholder involvement may mean little more than keeping local people informed about activities on site, including safety and environmental issues and future plans. Consultation by contrast is a two-way process, whereby the organisation asks individuals and groups for their views and then takes them into account in decision making. Where more involvement is appropriate, members of the community may even participate directly in the analysis and decision making.

Ultimate responsibility for the decision usually remains with the sponsoring organisation, but an objective of participation is often to reach a degree of consensus between the organisation, the community and other stakeholders on the way forward. Any one of these – information, consultation or participation – may be on-going, or it may be a "one-off" activity focused on a specific issue.

As a minimum, it is important that education and information provision form part of all involvement programmes. The need for a greater level of participation must then be determined in each situation. It is not important to achieve the highest possible level of participation, just the level that is most appropriate. Techniques at the lower level of participation may also be used to support techniques at a higher level; for example, the provision of information would support methods of consultation.

The different parties may start with different understandings of the level of involvement proposed and with different perceptions of what is fair and appropriate. These differences may prove difficult to resolve. The key thing is therefore to set out the purpose and relevance of the programme openly and honestly and to ensure that everybody is absolutely clear from the outset what is proposed.

The stakeholder involvement process should never be an end in itself. Rather, it should be an integral part of decision making and management processes. It only has meaning if all parties have this intent. The aim is to secure agreement for a stakeholder involvement programme that meets the aspirations of both the organisation and its stakeholders, but also one that takes account of the balance of cost and benefit and can be delivered in a timely and cost-effective manner.

9.2 Giving information

A public information process is intended solely to provide information to stakeholders. This usually means the local community but if national NGOs are to be constructively engaged they should routinely be provided with information to enable them to maintain an overview. Stakeholders may seek clarification, but they are not being invited to contribute to the decision making process.

Poor information provision is a common cause of complaint in consultations and lack of usable information is often the main barrier to understanding and participation in a stakeholder programme. Access to the right information, at the right level of detail and at the right time is the key to effective stakeholder involvement.

A local information programme will almost always be required for a major project dealing with contaminated land. Typically it would cover things such as plans, progress, events, public

safety and environmental performance. Local programmes should offer people the option to obtain more information or become more closely involved and should include information relating to NGOs and CBOs with relevant expertise and experience. Tools available include newsletters, websites, outreach events etc. Information on individual projects will often be part of a wider programme. Early, accurate and complete communication is a key element in building trust.

Good communication requires the consultation sponsor to look at the information needs from the perspective of a range of potential participants – from the least informed, least educated member of the community to the technically competent professional organisation. Common sense suggests that it is not likely to be effective if the sponsor merely circulates scientific or legal documents drawn up for other purposes and other audiences. The information should be presented in digestible forms but without oversimplifying the facts and issues. Some local people may not be able to read technical English, in which case translation becomes an issue. No single document is likely to fulfil these requirements, and therefore a suite of documents may need to be provided.

9.3 Consultation

Consultation seeks input from stakeholders to support and inform the decision making process. The sponsor typically provides information to the local community and other stakeholders and makes it possible for them to submit comments or ask questions about proposals. Consultation is a regulatory requirement in some contexts. Consultations offer large numbers of people the opportunity to comment on a proposal or options. They allow for community peer review of proposals and may identify new technical issues that need addressing. They also help sponsors understand stakeholder views and concerns, so they can be taken into account in decision making and risk communication. However they are limited in that there is usually little scope for contributing to identifying solutions or for taking part in the decision making process.

9.4 Participation

Participative decision making allows stakeholders to take an active role in the decision making process rather than simply providing comment on proposals. They are involved in shared analysis and agenda setting, even though the responsibility for the final decision lies with others.

A commitment to participation implies recognition of the benefits of consensus, even if there is no specific prior commitment to it. When talking about consensus it is essential to be clear about what is meant. One meaning is “unanimity”, ie each party must positively support the decision. More frequently however, it is used to describe a situation where a sufficient fraction of the participants positively support the decision. Others simply consent to it – even though they may not prefer it personally – because they consider it tolerable, or the best solution or agreement that can be achieved under the circumstances.

The more complex the issue and – in most cases – the more controversial it is, the more likely it is that a higher level of participation will be expected by stakeholders, required to develop understanding in the community, and necessary to get the quality of input being sought. The more participative the process, the more rewarding it generally is for all parties but there are limits to the contribution stakeholders can be asked to make.

Participative processes cannot easily reach large numbers of people and so usually need complementing with other initiatives to communicate with and gauge the opinion of the wider community.

10 Some tools and techniques

This section introduces some of the main techniques used within contaminated land stakeholder involvement programmes but SAFEGROUNDS does not publish guidance on detailed practice. A selection of useful references is provided in the *Further reading* section. The BERR Code of Practice is often referred to, but is designed mainly for Government policy consultations. The other references in the *Further reading* section are probably a better general practical introduction.

Newsletters

Written material used to convey information might involve a series of publications. Newsletters provide ongoing contact and information can be updated. They are a flexible form of publicity that can be designed to address the changing needs of the audience. They are useful to support liaison groups and have potential for feedback. Care should be taken in establishing the boundaries of distribution. The disadvantage is that not everyone will actually read a newsletter.

Project website

Either a project specific website or dedicated pages on the owner/operators' website is the normal starting point these days, acting as a portal to background information, consultation and assessment documents, involvement process details and materials, and links to external sites (often including NGOs/CBOs). Individuals and organisations can usually register their interest and submit comments on the topic or suggestions on process.

eConsultation

Online consultations and social media have not been much used in the context of involvement programmes covered by SAFEGROUNDS guidance, but they are an important part of the practitioner's toolkit and are likely to be used much more in the future. They may open up areas of the community that were previously "hard to reach" and can be cost-effective, but there are pitfalls and awareness-raising is still required.

Public meetings

Public meetings bring together interested and affected parties to present and exchange information and views on a proposal. If run well, they can provide a useful way of meeting other stakeholders and allowing people to hear a range of views. They demonstrate that the proponent is willing to meet with other interested parties. However, whilst appearing simple, they can be one of the most complex and unpredictable methods, and may result effectively in no consultation. Large public meetings can be intimidating and tend to discourage meaningful dialogue between the public and sponsor. Unless care is taken to represent all views, the public is likely to be dissatisfied and mistrustful.

"Drop in"/"open house"

In the open house model, interested parties are encouraged to visit the site or some other convenient venue on an informal basis to find out about a proposal and provide feedback. This can be an effective way of informing the public and other interested parties. People can visit at a convenient time, view exhibition materials, ask questions and provide feedback at their leisure. The downside is that only one side of the argument is normally represented.

Discussion packs

These are standardised packs of information – maybe including a video – that sets out the background and a range of topics for possible discussion. On major involvement programmes these have been used successfully to gather input from a wide variety of groups in the community, including schools, which would not normally participate. The meetings may be self-facilitated or delivered largely by neutral local intermediaries.

Deliberative workshops

Where there is a demand, workshops with a limited number of participants can be used to provide background information, discuss issues in detail and solve problems. They can provide a more open exchange of ideas and facilitate mutual understanding. They are useful for dealing with complex, technical issues and allowing more in-depth consideration, and can be targeted at particular groups – typically the more technically focused stakeholders and local authorities.

Structured decision making

A variety of structured and group decision making techniques are in regular use as part of stakeholder involvement programmes. One example is the multi criteria decision analysis approach often used as part of "best practical environmental option"/"best practical means" radioactive waste strategy development. A typical workshop brings a range of stakeholders together to increase understanding, and explore different perspectives on the options available and on the factors and weightings used to rank them. It informs and helps make the decision making process more transparent, but the aim is not generally consensus.

Opinion surveys

Sending out a document to selected organisations and individuals for comment may help collect representative views, but favours those with more time to respond and may miss key groups. Also, the balance of opinions expressed by those who self-select to respond to consultation initiatives or self-selecting surveys may bear no relation to the balance of opinions in society more widely. A more proactive approach using interviews and/or questionnaires may therefore be required. Independence is important is the results are to have credibility.

Focus groups

Focus groups or forums are meetings of invited participants designed to test the response to proposed actions and gain a detailed understanding of people's perspectives, values and concerns. They provide a quick means of gauging what public reaction to a proposal is likely to be and offer insights into existing perceptions and mental models etc but care needs to be taken if claiming them as part of an involvement programme because the format is directed and the participants are not usually those with a specific interest in the issue.

Strategic dialogue

Many activities could be described as dialogue. In this context, strategic stakeholder dialogue means an inclusive process that brings stakeholders together to address broader or strategically important decisions. Typically, corporate strategic stakeholder programmes run over 12 months or more to explore shared and different interests, and to build on common ground to reach an understanding or consensus. They are appropriate where a range of stakeholder groups, perhaps including industry and NGOs, need to be involved to address otherwise intractable issues and promote culture change.

Community liaison groups

Long-term community liaison groups already exist for many large industrial sites. They are an obvious channel for communication, but as discussed earlier in this paper they should not usually be the only one.

Where there is no standing local liaison group a project liaison group may be set up. They are common in some industry sectors, including the construction industry. They are relevant also to contaminated land projects, but most of the nuclear experience to date in this sector has been in the US.

11 Benchmark programmes

Every situation is different and the history, local situation and wider context will affect the appropriate scale and scope of involvement but some "benchmark" stakeholder involvement programmes are offered below to illustrate the points made in previous sections. Note that the programmes do not list all activities required.

Benchmark programmes, illustrating a typical mix of scope, stakeholders, tools and techniques. In all cases:

- check for factors that might indicate additional measures are appropriate
- anticipate, support and comply with regulatory requirements for notification, provision of information and consultation.

A "routine" operational local contamination or clean-up issue with no impact on the community and unlikely to cause concern.

- in many cases, it will be sufficient simplify to notify the local community liaison group at the next routine meeting.

A contamination or clean-up issue with the potential to generate significant local interest and debate.

- raise with local liaison group as soon as practicable and seek their advice on the appropriate level and scope of stakeholder input
- invite key local stakeholders (including local authorities) to provide input on issues to be taken into account and potential options
- keep local community and local stakeholders informed
- consider external input into option selection, eg BPEO panel
- consider event or other means of providing public with information
- invite local stakeholders to provide input on implementation issues
- provide feedback to participants
- make arrangements for on-going feedback of monitoring results.

A contamination or clean-up issue with strategic significance, likely to involve stakeholders at national level.

- raise with local liaison group as soon as practicable and seek advice on the appropriate level and scope of stakeholder input
- plan and make resources available for a significant stakeholder programme, co-ordinated with other consultations as necessary
- develop stakeholder, communication and (if required) training programmes. Make backgrounds and project specific information available (typically through website and links)
- initiate "front end" stakeholder programme to explore issues, perspectives, strategic implications and options with local and national level stakeholders. Pass on to third parties as appropriate
- integrate external stakeholder input explicitly into option selection
- provide feedback to participants
- initiate stakeholder programme to review option selection and implementation issues
- make arrangements for on-going feed back of monitoring results.

12 Further reading

General

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Stakeholder involvement

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Organisations and online resources

International Association for Public Participation (IAP2): **<www.iap2.org>**

Communityplanning.net: **<www.communityplanning.net>**

Consultation Institute: **<www.consultationinstitute.org>**