

*Preventing environmental damage from hazardous waste, and restoring contaminated sites for all Californians.*



State of California



Department of Toxic Substances Control

# Public Involvement

GUIDEBOOK, July 2004

## Public Participation during Project Investigation and Remedial Action Plans

Early and continual public participation is a cornerstone of the Department of Toxic Substances Control's (DTSC's) work. When DTSC oversees an investigation or cleanup of hazardous waste at a site, public participation activities are closely coordinated with the technical work. Generally, when DTSC receives a project, staff members contact community members to learn of their interests and how they want to participate in the project. This information helps create a customized outreach program that begins at the start of field work and ends with the final cleanup announcement.

Through our many years of working with California's diverse communities, DTSC recognizes that public involvement in the decision-making process results in better environmental risk management decisions.

### How it Works

1. To introduce ourselves to the community and learn how the community wants to be involved, DTSC often distributes a written **community survey**. The survey is typically distributed to addresses near the site, the local community's key leaders, businesses, local elected officials and statewide environmental stakeholders. A **mailing list** is developed and updated continuously throughout the investigation and cleanup activities. If you are interested in participating in the survey, or wish to be included in the mailing list, contact us through our Web site ([www.dtsc.ca.gov](http://www.dtsc.ca.gov)) or through our regional offices listed at the end of this guidebook.
2. Furthering our understanding of the public's interests, **community interviews** are held with a cross section of the community's leaders and residents. The survey and interview information is documented in a **public participation plan**. This plan becomes the blueprint for how DTSC will work with the community throughout the project.
3. **Community letters** and **fact sheets** are used to summarize the site's progress and announce public comment periods. They are translated into appropriate languages, distributed to the project mailing list and posted on DTSC's Web site. Included in each of these documents are the names and contact information for DTSC project team members. Contact them directly at any time you have questions or want to state your concerns.



4. To assist the community in learning more about a particular site, a local **information repository** is established. It contains technical documents that are used in determining the proposed cleanup activity. The typical repository location is the closest public library to the site; however the location is based on the community's preference. Once the repository is established, the location is announced in fact sheets, public notices and community letters. If you have questions about the material in the repository, please contact any member of the DTSC project team.

5. Once a proposed cleanup plan is identified, DTSC holds a **30-day public comment period** to receive comments from all interested parties. To receive verbal comments on the proposed plan, a **community meeting**, and possibly an **open house**, are held during the comment period. Language interpretation is provided at these meetings, when necessary. At the close of the 30-day comment period, DTSC evaluates all comments received and either approves or modifies the cleanup plan. To document DTSC's evaluation of each comment, a written **response to comments** is created and sent to anyone who provides comments or requests a copy. Additionally, a Final Remedial Action (cleanup) Plan is public noticed in the local newspaper.

6. After the decision is approved, the cleanup plan is fully designed and may be summarized in a fact sheet that is sent to the project mailing list and the information repository, when there is public interest.

7. At the conclusion of cleanup activities, a **certification letter** is often sent to everyone on the project mailing list informing them the cleanup is complete. For some sites that require a long-term involvement, the community is kept informed on the "operation and maintenance" activities through fact sheets and letters.

Contact Us for More Information

DTSC Internet address: [www.dtsc.ca.gov](http://www.dtsc.ca.gov)

**Joyce Whiten**  
Northern California  
(916) 255-6684

**Larry Woodson**  
Northern California  
(916)255-3648

**Diane Fowler**  
Northern California Coast  
(916) 255-6682

**Randi Jorgensen**  
Los Angeles County (northern)  
Ventura and Santa Barbara Counties  
(818) 551-2192

**Mona Arteaga**  
Los Angeles County (southern)  
Orange, San Diego, Riverside, Imperial and San Bernardino Counties  
(714) 484-5416