

**Report on Interviews Regarding Future
Community Engagement Needs for
the Tar Ponds and Coke Oven Site
Environmental Remediation Project**

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1. Introduction

This report consolidates information collected in a series of interviews with individuals and groups regarding future community engagement for the cleanup of the Tar Ponds and Coke Oven Site in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

This introduction is Section 1, which gives an overview of the report format.

In Section 2 background information on community engagement activities is provided.

The approach used to gather community opinion is discussed in Section 3. This includes comments on preliminary design of the interview format, development of the list of interviewees, and other factors.

Section 4 provides a synthesis of the views collected during the interview process.

Section 5 provides a brief summary and conclusion, highlighting those themes which were most widely expressed during the interviews, and noting those areas where interviewees feel that governments should take special care in design and implementation of the next generation of the community engagement process.

A list of interviewees is presented as Appendix A. The Statement of Objectives, questions and lead-in comments are attached as Appendix B. The facilitator's notes from each interview are attached as Appendix C.

2. Background

The Tar Ponds and Coke Ovens site contains environmental contamination from more than a century of steel production, and other pollutants such as sanitary waste.

Created in the fall of 1996, the Joint Action Group (JAG) is a community-driven process which includes community representatives and three levels of government. First conceived to find a solution to the Sydney Tar Ponds, JAG evolved and broadened its mandate to include the former Coke Ovens site and municipal landfill, along with the Tar Ponds.

One of JAG's priorities has been to ensure that citizens participate in developing recommendations to governments regarding cleanup options. JAG made their recommendation to governments on the cleanup options on May 28th.

Information on the process leading up to and including the motion is found on the JAG web site: <http://www.muggah.org>.

The project is entering a new phase which includes governments' decision on the options, environmental assessment, and project implementation. The type of future community engagement needed is being reviewed at this time. Therefore, the funding for the current Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between JAG and three levels of government has not been renewed and will expire mid-September, 2003. Governments will be undertaking a number of activities to gather data to assist in the development of models of community engagement suitable for the next phases of the cleanup. This report is the product of one of those activities.

3. Approach

BLSmith Groupwork Inc. of Liverpool, Nova Scotia was contracted to interview selected individuals and group representatives to get their views on how community engagement should be undertaken during the next phases of the Sydney Tar Ponds and Coke Ovens Site remediation project.

This is one element in a larger piece of work to decide on how the community should continue to be engaged. Other activities undertaken by the government partners include looking at case studies of other major projects, reviewing federal and provincial government guidelines, and consulting reference materials for best practices in community engagement.

Between July 14th and July 23rd, 22 interviews were conducted with 60 individual citizens and representatives of stakeholder groups.

The interviews were conducted by Bruce Smith. He was assisted in note taking by Ms Donna Keough of Cape Breton Regional Municipality. In attendance as observers and occasionally asking a follow-up question were a representative of the federal and provincial government.

The groups and individuals selected were intended to be representative of a cross-section of opinion from individuals and organizations within the broader community.

The content of Section 4 is a synthesis of the views expressed by interviewees. Although not every sentence begins with the words “An interviewee expressed the view that ...”, the reader should be aware that all views are those of the participants, and not of the interviewer.

The interviews followed a consistent format. They began with Bruce Smith, the facilitator, giving brief introductory comments on why these interviews were taking place, and what governments hope to achieve by hearing the views of some individuals and groups within the community. He described the context and areas in which decisions had been made, while also informing the interviewees about those areas in which decisions had not been made, and the opportunity that existed for them to influence the outcome.

There are two areas specified in which decisions that have been made.

1. The government partners will not continue to fund the current Joint Action Group Memorandum of Understanding after its expiration date of September 18th. The status quo is not considered to be an option for future community engagement activities.

2. Governments have made the decision that in the future all aspects of the process will be managed by a single entity -- that could be a government department, Crown corporation or private organization. That entity will have responsibility for all aspects of project management, including procurement, tendering, contract management, communication, public relations and community engagement.

Following the introductory comments, Bruce read a draft statement of objectives and asked the interviewees to give their responses to it. He noted that the statement was a “straw man”, provided simply to stimulate comments from the interviewees.

The interviewees were then asked a series of six questions about their thoughts on future community engagement as the cleanup process moved to the next stages. The initial comments, statement of objectives and questions are attached as Appendix B.

In this report we highlight some key information, and present other information in a more aggregated form. Specifically,

- we note where interviewees hold shared or similar views;
- we note where interviewees expressed divergent views, and try to avoid expressing one perspective without giving the balance of the other perspective;
- we include commentary or views from individuals in order to give the implementing organization the benefit of these ideas, but do so in a way which does not suggest a majority view or strongly held opinion;
- we do not include comments about specific individuals or groups, or comments that in our view do not contribute to the design of the future community engagement model; and,
- we use the terms “most,” “a majority,” “many,” “a number of,” “several,” “a small number of,” “a few” and “one” or “an individual” to give weighting to the comments.

4. Interview Results

This section is organized in five subsections that cover: degree of community involvement, information and communication, community engagement methods, key themes and guiding principles.

4.1 Degree of Involvement

There was a strong feeling among a large majority of interviewees that two way information flow is the primary requirement after September 18th. It is understood that the environmental assessment process will have its own community engagement process, so most participants focused on needs during the implementation phase of the project. It was generally felt that the most complex and difficult community consultation had been accomplished, i.e., developing and assessing options and making recommendations to government.

With that being completed, it was felt that implementation would not require the same level of engagement as had been previously used. From here on this will be an engineering project that requires technical expertise. Decisions can now be left to the experts, and the community role will be one of receiving information from and providing its views to the implementing organization. The community role will be advisory, with opportunity for input that may or may not affect the decisions that the implementing body will make.

Several interviewees indicated that two way information flow would be fine for implementation, but the community would need more in-depth involvement in the coming months when the actual project description/definition is developed.

It was specifically noted that a much greater level of community engagement would be required should governments not accept the community recommendations regarding remediation approaches, and decide on another course of action. It was suggested that this will be especially challenging should governments decide on options which the community has strongly rejected in the past.

A number of participants felt that more than information flow would be required, and that the community would need and want to be more directly involved in both ongoing monitoring/watchdog activities, and in how the ongoing decisions were made. The suggestion that information sharing was sufficient received several responses that indicated this was tokenism and a regressive step. These individuals expressed the view that information exchange was too passive, and that there should be a greater level of interaction and dialogue between the community and the project manager.

These individuals further suggested that the community should be able to “influence” or “impact” project decisions; and that in order to have a greater impact on decisions, the community should be a participant in joint planning.

A few interviewees expressed the view that the consultation was adequately done over the past few years, and that now was the time for action. They felt that more consultation is not needed.

4.2 Information and Communication

This section considers three aspects of information and communication: what information is needed by the community to understand and be comfortable with the cleanup project activities? What information will the project management organization need from the community to do its work in a safe, effective and efficient manner? How should feedback be communicated from the implementing organization to the community?

4.2.1 What information will the community need?

This section discusses the provision of information to the community under four headings: general comments and thoughts; basic project information; seeing the big picture; and, information about health, safety and environment.

General comments and thoughts

When the need arises for community voices to be heard, a process must be designed and in place to make that happen. Once the project is in motion it is hard to get changes made. The community needs to ask questions and get answers before things start.

It was noted by a number of interviewees that information must be available early, and it must be complete. All necessary and desired information should be available for the community; nothing should be withheld.

The community has input; the organization makes the decisions. Community input must be for a purpose. It must be relevant, and immediate.

The community should have thorough information, complete and uncensored; speedy answers to questions; technical knowledge about the process. The identity of the information provider can be as important as the content - it can build trust. It was suggested that this should be viewed in two ways. First, the information the community tells you it needs (its interests) ... can be discovered through focus

groups, polling, and other previously mentioned techniques. Second, the project vision (what you want to achieve) and progress (what the implementing organization is doing or has done to move toward the vision/goals) can be provided in various ways.

Basic project information

The implementing organization should provide a wide range of information, from basic to highly technical. More information is generally considered to be better. It should be noted that several other participants expressed the view that more information is not always better, that the public can be overwhelmed with information that is confusing and does not enhance understanding. They believe that the amount of information provided to the community should be carefully considered.

Information provided should include items such as project stages and details: what will happen, when, next steps, timelines, schedules, milestones, goals, game plan, and progress reports. It should include variations and costs, and the possibility of delays.

Clear mission and mandate, structure and contact information -- how they can link with the implementing agency -- should be provided. The implementing organization should think in terms of providing sector specific information: for example, economic information to business, job information to labour, and environment, health and safety information to the whole community.

See the big picture

A number of participants felt that it was important to give the community a big picture view of the project. One felt it was important to deal with the project as a whole system situation; that the previous approaches resulted in a fragmented view, and that a useful perspective was based on future site use -- which is the end result of this entire project. The end result would be a safe and attractive site that is

beneficial to the community.

It was suggested that the implementing organization develop a road map to show direction from start to finish. It would show the main road, but acknowledge that there will likely be some changes along the way.

A number of interviewees stated that the community should be directly involved in the discussion of future site use. [See Future Site Use, section 4.4.3]

Information about health, safety and environment

A large number of participants felt it would be essential for the community to have detailed information about health, safety and the environment. Specific suggestions were made about risk, and possible health effects. Community should have information about risks associated with various stages of the project and what the implementing body will do to minimize or address them.

It was noted that the safety of the project is critical, that there need to be contingency plans and worst case scenarios, and that the project should link with Cape Breton Regional Municipality Emergency Measures Organization plans.

Information about the environment, emissions and impacts on individuals and the community should be provided in the form of scientific and technical reports. Workers need information relating to their occupational health and safety while on the job. They should be considered a sector of the community when it comes to specific information needs.

Monitoring data is an important type of information. Monitoring builds trust, especially if there is independent verification. Community-based monitoring lets people be responsible and contributes to community trust and credibility. People defined certain geographic areas as needing more information than other areas that were further away from the work site.

4.2.2 What information will the implementing agency need?

In the view of many participants the implementing organization will require a range of information about the community in order to do its work in a safe, effective and efficient manner. The organization should understand the history of the site and previous clean up attempts, as well as the community engagement process as it has been implemented in the past five years.

They should also be aware of the individual sectors and interests within the larger community, elements of diversity, and where power and influence reside. They will need to know how the community feels about the engagement process, and its views on future site use.

The implementing organization will need to know what concerns, questions and views the community has, especially relating to health and safety issues. How might the project impact the community? What things might the community find annoying? (e.g. truck traffic, back-up beepers.)

In order to minimize risk, the implementing body should know the community rhythms and activities. What does the community see as an acceptable level of risk? What values will it want to have considered when tradeoffs are made? What are the preferred methods for communicating and engaging various segments of the community?

It was suggested that community information needs are greater at the front end of the project. If major decisions are required that will affect quality of life, residents should be informed and their views heard.

The implementing body needs to get input/feedback from the community regarding the information that has been provided through various means. This is discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.2.3 How should feedback be provided to the community?

Providing feedback to the community on how views are taken into account was considered an essential part of community engagement by a large majority of interviewees.

Having a feedback loop is important -- interest will be especially high in the beginning. It is important to get back to individuals who have asked a question, raised a concern or given their input. Respect is shown when feedback is provided. Trust and confidence are enhanced when input is acknowledged.

Views must be heard and respected, and reflected back so that people know they have been heard; then they will feel respected, knowing their views will be taken into account.

Feedback is important in demonstrating accountability. There should be two tracks of accountability: committee accountability for how it is influencing the implementing organization; and the organization for what it is doing and how the project is being implemented.

4.3 Community engagement methods

Interviewees discussed a number of community engagement methods that they felt were effective. These included: Web site, store front office, site tours, phone line, printed materials, personal contact, public media and a number of others. Public meetings received strongly mixed reviews. It was widely noted that community engagement will require the use of a range of techniques to be used for various purposes, at different times, and/or to engage different segments of the community. It was noted that information about preferred methods has also been obtained through community surveys that were conducted by JAG. The techniques outlined here may be useful for providing information to the community, for getting information from the community, or both.

4.3.1 Details about a liaison group or advisory committee

A large majority of those interviewed felt that there was a role for a community liaison group or advisory committee of some type. There were a range of comments about the appropriate role of such a group, how representation should be established, its size, structure, resources, and the knowledge and capacity of its members.

Role of a community liaison committee

A liaison group or advisory committee will be necessary. Group members must understand what they can do, and what they can't do. They should have a clear Terms of Reference, and understand the scope of work. It should look at issues that are directly related to the cleanup work.

It was suggested that the specific role of the group, as well as other design factors, would depend upon whether or not the community remediation recommendations are accepted by governments. It was noted that a community liaison group cannot become an end in itself. Several interviewees felt that a committee would not be needed during implementation.

Some interviewees felt that a liaison committee should not engage the broader community; others felt that it should serve as an intermediary between the implementing body and the community. However, interviewees felt that if a liaison committee did engage the community, it would not prevent the implementing body from using other direct forms of community engagement.

As noted in the initial discussion of the level of community involvement, there were divergent views among interviewees on this topic. The large majority expressed the view that future community engagement should be about information exchange, input and feedback. A smaller group expressed the view that the process needed to involve the community more deeply, even to the point of the community being involved in ongoing decisions.

Method for Information Exchange

The majority of participants envision a community committee as serving in an advisory or liaison role. The group would receive information from the implementing body, and provide information, views and feedback to the organization, based on discussions with their respective constituencies.

The committee could be a forum for ongoing dialogue -- asking questions, making comments, raising concerns. The committee could make recommendations to the implementing body. Some felt that the committee could serve a “watchdog” role, while others felt that role was not appropriate.

A number of interviewees expressed the view that the committee would have an advisory role, and be broadly representative of the community. It would report back through the representatives of member organizations. It would not serve in an intermediary capacity to collect or filter the views of residents. It would be one community engagement mechanism, along with others that were initiated by the implementing organization.

A small number of others felt that the committee should be more than an advisory body, and could run the entire community engagement process, rather than being just one or many engagement mechanisms. The committee would have a clear responsibility to bring community views forward. It was suggested that an intermediate body could filter/funnel multiple public views and prevent the implementing agency from getting overwhelmed.

Sounding board / early warning mechanism

It was suggested that a citizen committee could be a sounding board and early warning mechanism for the implementing body. The organization would get information out in advance to the committee. The group should meet regularly, communicate well, and understand the process. It should be a small, well-informed group that could provide feedback, but not have control.

To be effective the implementing body must get committee feedback on issues before discussing them with the community; each issue should be discussed openly with the committee. The community group should be given information early -- so it can stay "ahead of the curve." The community at large will get information later through other methods.

Take part in decision making

A number of interviewees felt that the community role should include having input into ongoing project decisions. It was suggested that there needed to be an interactive model: where informed choices could be made, working with partners, all in this together.

It was suggested that advisory committee members could also serve as allies, ambassadors and resource persons for the implementing organization and the project in general. It could represent a coalition of supportive stakeholders. By keeping the committee informed, the members could assist the organization in correcting rumours and misinformation that sometimes appears.

Representation

A strong majority of interviewees felt that a community committee should be made up of representatives of a cross section of community neighbourhoods, sectors and interests. They often noted that legitimacy is established through history, size of membership and ability to speak for a well-established constituency. The members of the committee should be organizations that have standing and currency in the community. Their representatives should have a responsibility to bring their organization's views to the table and to report back to their constituents the key information and nature of discussions. It was noted that having a fixed term for membership of 3 years would be beneficial, so that new energy and ideas were brought to the group, and that no individuals or perspectives would become too entrenched.

Some felt that having citizens at large was not necessary, or if so, there should be one seat designated for a citizen at large. Others stated that the participation of citizens at large should be reduced from the previous process. The concern was expressed that this provided an opportunity for the expression of an individual view, but not one that was necessarily representative of wider community interests. It was felt that there are other more appropriate engagement mechanisms through which individual citizens can be involved.

A small number of interviewees expressed views in favour of a more open membership, one that had room for minority perspectives and more participation by citizens at large.

It was suggested that representation be broad and balanced, using factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, vocation, church, sector, service group, income level, employed and unemployed; and include groups such as rate payers, community development associations, Chamber of Commerce, municipal councillors, environmental groups, fish and game groups, health authority, and unions.

It was suggested that the group could have broad representation from community groups - it could be organized as a forum to express opinion, for example, structured along the lines of the Council of Churches. The Cape Breton Growth Fund Corporation Advisory Committee, which provides strategic advice and performs a watchdog role, but has no public voice, was suggested as another possible model.

A large majority of interviewees noted that special consideration should be shown to residents of neighbourhoods close to the site to ensure they are well represented. [See Section 4.4.1] The view was expressed that representation should be local, i.e. from Cape Breton Regional Municipality.

Several interviewees noted that there should be a structure where the whole community sits together with the proponent and/or government to receive information and discuss issues. Others expressed the view that governments should not be represented on such a committee, and that the committee should talk to governments as necessary in one-on-one discussions.

Size

Many of the interviewees expressed the view that a community committee should be relatively small -- perhaps 8 - 15 members. One person suggested that criteria for committee size should be a balance: small enough to be effective, and large enough to accommodate interested groups.

Capacity

Individuals who are chosen to serve as representatives should be reasonable, knowledgeable and credible. They should have a basic understanding of the scientific and technical aspects of the project. Organizations should choose representatives carefully to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and abilities to participate effectively.

Structure

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of having an effective chair. It was suggested that the chair could have the ability to speak publicly about the workings and views of the group. Several individuals noted that the chair should be a volunteer position.

It was generally agreed by interviewees that if a group is formed, it would require some level of administrative support. It was suggested by a number of participants that support for the group should be provided by a mechanism other than permanent staff. Options included support provided by the implementing body, or possibly from the administration units within members organizations on a one-year rotating basis.

It was suggested by another interviewee that effective volunteer groups often have support staff. It was noted that regardless of how the support was provided, it must not become too bureaucratic, and the needs of the volunteers and community should be paramount.

The following specific points were raised:

- When meeting minutes are taken, they should be clear and complete.
- Members should be able to invite special guests to meetings.
- The group should draw on the community for specific resources and capacities -- specialized additions for a purpose.
- The committee should elect an executive committee of 5-6 that has authority.
- All participants should be responsible for their own actions.
- Several interviewees saw no need for consensus decision-making in this group, while a couple of others specified that the group should make decisions by consensus.

Resources and Support

The nature of the work would dictate the need for resources and support. The group should get support from the implementing body, but with some independence (a bit of arms length.) Give the group access to tools and a budget, set in advance to ensure certainty and some autonomy. The community committee should have access to useful and reliable monitoring data.

Neutral third parties may be helpful for verification of information. Technical advisors who are paid by the implementing body can provide advice to the community group -- also for health and planning.

A number of interviewees made the point that committee members, including the Chair, should be volunteers. The view was expressed by one interviewee that participation on this type of committee requires a large time commitment, and that there should be some financial compensation provided.

Other participant comments:

- The committee must have dedicated resources for communication.
- An independent facilitator should be provided who has the group's confidence.
- Group members should have some level of status and recognition; give them a profile, and let them know that they are making a difference.
- Provide training and capacity building for group members, perhaps each one could attend one conference per year.
- When consultants are used they should have the ability to remain neutral and professional, and not be swayed by governments.
- There should be funding provided for citizen participation for items such as child care and independent research so the community can participate as equals.

4.3.2 Other Community Engagement and Communication Techniques

Following are suggestions for effective engagement techniques that should be used in addition to a community advisory or liaison committee.

Use a range of techniques

All interviewees suggested more than one technique: some specified that a range should be used; a number stated that special effort and methods should be used for those closest to the site who are likely to be most affected. It was also noted that specific community neighbourhoods and sectors had preferred methods for being engaged, and that the implementing organization should be aware of this.

Public Meetings

Reactions were mixed regarding the effectiveness of public meetings. The most common reaction was that public meetings are often not productive. Views were expressed that the voices heard at public meetings are often neither reflective nor representative of the community. It was pointed out that meetings can be easily hijacked or disrupted by individuals.

Others felt that public meetings could provide an effective forum for expression of community views. It was suggested that the effectiveness of meetings could be improved by having a moderator or facilitator, a definite agenda, and limited individual speaking time. It was noted that meetings where information is presented can help people understand complex issues.

Web site

A Web site is seen by a large number of interviewees as a critical tool that reaches people everywhere with timely information. The next stage of community engagement should have a Web site, keep it up to date and maintain a high standard of information. This would include a range of styles and levels of information from basic general interest pieces to highly technical scientific and engineering papers and reports. It can also be used to receive information if it

includes an e-mail function or other interactive feature. It was noted that a majority of residents do not have Internet access.

Store Front Office/Liaison Office

This is a place for people to go to talk with someone in person and get timely answers to their questions and concerns. It can be an effective means of establishing personal contact, and having questions answered in this way can give the community confidence and build trust. People can walk in during hours of operation and hear about the project. The office can be operated by an internal liaison person representing the implementing body, who is known by the community, and who ensures that feedback is provided.

Site Tours

There is strong support for the value of site tours as a community engagement technique. This was seen by a number of interviewees as having high value in helping community members visualize and understand the complexity of the situation, especially when the tours are lead by an individual with technical knowledge and expertise.

Phone Line

This is seen as an especially useful technique. The implementing organization will know that community residents can call with questions or concerns at any time. To the extent possible the phone should be answered by a real person rather than a machine. Consideration should be give to making this available 24 hours a day, and perhaps as a 1-800 number if there is a chance that some calls may be long distance.

Personal contact

This was raised by a number of people as being a very important factor in good community engagement. It was mentioned as a positive aspect of using a storefront office, door to door information, doing site tours, and having a real person on a 1-800 number or 24-hour phone line rather than an answering machine.

It was noted that the implementing body should have a manager and staff designated for communication, public relations and community engagement, and that they should become known to the community. With personal contact, residents know they have been heard. This can build trust and confidence in the project management organization.

Printed Materials

A variety of printed materials were mentioned as being effective for various segments of the community. These included: newsletters, reports, workbooks, press releases and brochures. It was noted that these should be written in clear language, generally free of jargon.

Public Media

Newspapers and fliers were considered by a number of participants to be effective in providing information to the community. TV and radio were also mentioned, but not as frequently.

A number of other general techniques were suggested by interviewees. These include: coffee groups or kitchen meetings; open houses; presentations; surveys; billboards; and posters. Maps, models, charts and graphics were suggested as good alternatives to print communication, or they could be used in conjunction with it. It was suggested that public debate, (perhaps among technical professionals, government and community representatives) should be encouraged; and that informal community leaders should be informed -- an advisory committee is good for this. The informal leaders can lend their credibility and aid in communication.

Techniques specifically for “closing the loop”

Personal, direct approaches were favored by a large number of interviewees in situations where the implementing organization was responding to comments, questions, concerns or input of community members. These may include e-mail, phone, letter and direct conversation. Consistency is viewed as important, with recommendation to the implementing organization to use one person whenever possible. Responses should be timely. This is a sign of respect.

A number of people also suggested interactive aspects of Web sites, where information can be provided by the organization and input given by the community. Using this format for questions and answers would ensure that they were visible and open for all to see.

It was suggested that a strategy be developed for provision of feedback, so that it is routine, and becomes an integral part of the community engagement process.

A participant suggested that having a senior person attend meetings, as well as take and return calls, made a strong statement to the community and to the organization. It was noted that after awhile things would start to get done locally, as staff were empowered, and a culture of community focus developed.

A system should be developed to monitor complaints and keep statistics. Community silence may not always be a sign of confidence in the organization. Sometimes when community views are expressed, decisions are opposite. When this happens it is important to explain to the community how the decision was made -- how their ideas and concerns were considered, even if they were not used.

4.4 Themes

A number of themes emerged from the interviews. These include:

- 4.4.1 Pay special attention to those closest to the site and most affected
- 4.4.2 Focus on getting the site cleaned up
- 4.4.3 The community should discuss future site use
- 4.4.4 Ensure that there is continuous communication and engagement
- 4.4.5 Implications of the choice of remediation approaches
- 4.4.6 Governments must cooperate with each other, and demonstrate their commitment to the project
- 4.4.7 Make use of existing JAG information and data base
- 4.4.8 Additional factors can contribute to effective community engagement
- 4.4.9 Economic benefits to the community
- 4.4.10 Use appropriate language for information
- 4.4.11 Correct misperceptions about the community
- 4.4.12 Intimidation and process disruption are not acceptable
- 4.4.13 Create a culture of continuous learning
- 4.4.14 Improve the objectivity of media coverage
- 4.4.15 Recognize a role for elected representatives
- 4.4.16 Focus on the majority while ensuring minority views are heard
- 4.4.17 Environmental Assessment
- 4.4.18 Capabilities and nature of the implementing body

4.4.1 Pay special attention to those closest to the site and most affected

The community was described by a number of interviewees as having two distinct components: one that is the immediately affected, adjacent community; and another that is the community at large. Information needs will be different for the general community when compared with those closest to the site. Addressing both must be part of a planned approach to communication and community engagement.

It was a view held in common by many participants that the implementing organization will need to give special attention to residents closest to the site, and those likely to be impacted directly.

The project manager will need to understand the dynamics of the communities near the site, and give priority to their interests. There should be a radius of concern -- the closer to the site, the greater the interest, the greater the attention. This is likely to require the use of different engagement techniques. There should be more opportunities for input from people in surrounding communities. This might include providing aid or coaching, or selecting a trusted individual to provide assistance. Efforts must be made to engage the residents from different cultural backgrounds.

4.4.2 Focus on getting the site cleaned up

A large number of participants cited citizen fatigue and frustration as a major concern, and indicated that in their view most community members wanted a responsible agency or governments to just get on with the cleanup and get it done. The community has been studied to death. Citizens are ready to go, to get the job done; if it happens people will buy in; people are tired; get it done, do it now. Cape Breton people are ready for a cleanup. This will move Sydney forward.

There should not continue to be diversions, including delays for engagement processes. Community members can cause long delays if they are given too much information, or incomplete information. The implementing organization must

ensure in future process that uninformed individuals are not able to gridlock or dominate the process. Also it was noted by several interviewees that health studies should be decoupled from the cleanup, and dealt with by a responsible organization, probably the Regional Health Authority, in the broader context of wellness and population health issues. It was felt that if this is not done, it will slow down the cleanup effort.

Some interviewees noted that the future economic health of Sydney was tied directly to the cleanup, and the sooner things get cleaned up, the sooner Sydney will get turned around.

4.4.3 The community should discuss future site use

Future site use is a community issue, and an important topic for community engagement. There should be a vision for future site use - a picture of what the site will look like during construction and when things are restored. Future site use is a topic that will need a lot of interaction. Site remediation is very important, but it is still just a means to an end.

Future site use is about forward thinking, with the focus on vision and end result. The question “How will what is happening affect future site use?” must be kept in mind as a focus point; it is like a filter to help assess other information. It may almost be seen as a separate process.

4.4.4 Ensure that there is continuous communication and engagement

A number of interviewees expressed the view that there should be no gap in information flow to the community between September 18th and the start of the EA process, and ultimately until project implementation. There must be a quick transition of project communication duties. It was noted by several participants that there is a void right now, and the community needs to know what will happen. There must be a responsible organization at all times. The communication and engagement processes must be continuous.

4.4.5 Implications of the choice of remediation approaches

Governments have received the community recommendations for remediation options and are in the process of deciding how the project will be designed. It was pointed out by several interviewees that the process that generated those options was extensive; there is a strong expectation that since they reflect the wishes of the community, those options will be accepted.

However it was also pointed out by several of the participants that the outcome is far from certain, and that governments will either accept the community recommendations, in which case short term community engagement may be relatively straightforward; or, governments will choose another set of options, which will make the future for community engagement more challenging and complex.

Concern was expressed that taking a course of action other than the one recommended by the community could undermine confidence, trust and government credibility in the eyes of the community. In addition, some felt it would require that governments conduct another community engagement process to bring the revised options into community view for discussion, and that this might require a government “selling job”. Not only would this be an issue of confidence, trust and credibility, but it could be another delay at a time when the community is wanting and expecting things to start moving toward the EA process and project implementation.

4.4.6 Governments must cooperate with each other, and demonstrate their commitment to the project

A number of interviewees stated that it was critical for the three levels of government to work together cooperatively to see this project through. Governments must work out their divergence of views in a constructive manner, and get along with each other. They must be seen to communicate effectively with each other and the community. This is important if the public is to have trust and confidence in government leadership. Also, there must be certainty around the fiscal commitment to move forward and complete the project.

4.4.7 Make use of existing JAG information and data base

It was recommended by several interviewees that governments capture and make use of information already gathered through community engagement. The information gathered so far in the project should be carried forward. The information available on the Web site should be seen as an asset.

4.4.8 Additional factors can contribute to effective community engagement

A number of interviewees expressed the view that the community should have input, but the organization should make the decisions. The implementing body must gain community trust. It will be judged by its actions: it will be important to provide information up front; ensure early contact; allow or encourage expression of views; and get feedback.

The implementing body should adopt a calm and reasoned management style -- with a variety of expertise -- and the ability to deliver an effective community engagement program. Reason and common sense should underlie its approach, and it should demonstrate comfort and be visible to the community. It should listen to and answer all views and then take a firm direction -- the community wants this. One person described this as a community focused process, not

community driven.

The implementing body should take control of the information process to ensure accurate, timely information to the people who need it. The onus is on the implementing body to frame information well and completely, and help the community focus on the big picture.

It was suggested that if the manager of the implementing body was a trusted local person, community confidence would increase. An alternative suggestion was made that a manager “from away” might retain a greater ability to be independent and not be influenced by criticism and pressure.

It was noted by several interviewees that it will be important for the implementing body to follow regulations and guidelines, and that if they do it may reduce the need for community engagement.

Effective community engagement is supported when the implementing organization’s staff understand and accept information before it goes out to the public. A stakeholder database will be a useful tool for the implementing body. If kept up to date, it can help to ensure that the community engagement process is delivering good information in the best form to the appropriate people.

4.4.9 Economic benefits to the community

It was noted by a number of participants that for the cleanup work to have the maximum impact on the community, local job creation, training and economic activity in general should be considered a priority. As much as possible, the cleanup should leave money in CBRM and Cape Breton. This should include work in trades as well as professional jobs, including the senior project engineer and perhaps the overall project manager.

Building the local capacity to fill jobs and provide other necessary services is seen as

part of the legacy that can result from the cleanup.

It was noted that it may be possible for there to be some alignment of project benefits with community benefits (e.g. reduced air fares for residents flying to Halifax.) It was also suggested that part of the remediation dollars be used to develop the site after remediation takes place.

It will be important to think about what type of jobs will be created during the cleanup process, and to ensure that suitable training is provided for local residents so they can qualify for the work. It would be helpful to connect the community to an overall strategy for economic development.

4.4.10 Use appropriate language for information

It was suggested that the implementing body should be careful in its communication to use plain, clear language. At the same time this does not mean talking down to people.

It would be helpful to have information in both simple form for those who want a general overview, as well as more detailed information for individuals who want to have a more in-depth understanding. When technical or scientific papers are released they should be made available in full. There are some who would even like to see the various stages of peer review.

4.4.11 Correct misperceptions about the community

This is not Canada's most contaminated site, many are worse. There is a need to get the message out and change the perception. There is a negative impact on the reputation of Sydney and the local economy; it has put a cloud over the community. The community has pride: Sydney is changing; it is getting cleaner. Completing the cleanup will give the community a feeling of being in control of its own destiny.

4.4.12 Intimidation and process disruption are not acceptable

Consideration should be given to ensuring that the community engagement process is free from intimidation and disruption, especially if a committee is developed. People should be committed to participating in a constructive manner, and not being disruptive. People must understand that the project must go on. There needs to be a collaborative, respectful forum for community dialogue; people will need to make sacrifices for the greater community good. All participants must be responsible for their own actions.

4.4.13 Create a culture of continuous learning

Whatever we do, we must build on success, and continue to work on community/government trust, which is now bruised. We should learn what we can from the history of Sydney Tar Ponds Cleanup Inc. Look for learning and lessons in everything, even in negative perspectives. Learn from other processes around the world.

4.4.14 Improve the objectivity of media coverage

In the view of a number of interviewees, the project has been very political, and the media has not reported the story objectively. The press elevated and highlighted a few dissidents, giving the illusion of a break in solidarity and continuity, and giving those voices too much influence. The press could do a lot better. The project would benefit from improved media relations, to reduce the sensationalism and enable better understanding. It is important to be honest and transparent with the press.

4.4.15 Recognize a role for elected representatives

There should be a role for elected officials -- keep them informed and they will be able to communicate comfort to participants and it will contribute to a positive community outlook; put trust in local elected representatives. Keep them informed; they can help reduce the spread of misinformation. It would be helpful if municipal staff sit on the community committee.

4.4.16 Focus on the majority while ensuring minority views are heard

A number of interviewees expressed the view that community engagement should not be dominated or hijacked by a vocal minority. They note that there will be a broad spectrum of views, but suggest that the implementing body should target the centre, where the majority is concentrated. Work on the basis of dealing with the majority -- it isn't possible to satisfy all interests. Keep vocal minority from taking control of the agenda. Don't reinvent the wheel, use existing models that are effective. You can't please everyone.

However, to the extent that residents in close proximity to the site are a minority group, the large majority of interviewees recognized this as being a legitimate need for special attention -- both in terms of information and techniques.

Several interviewees expressed concerns regarding minority voices in the community. One focus was the Black community, which it was suggested was not effectively engaged in the previous process. The Black community should be seen as a stakeholder and engaged in an effective manner.

Another focus was others who see themselves on the "outside" of the process, perhaps because of having been critical in the past. These individuals may be best represented through direct citizen representation on a community committee, or techniques that will engage them directly in broader community discussions.

4.4.17 Environmental Assessment

Interviewees recognized that the Environmental Assessment (EA) process will be on its own track -- driven by legislation; and that there are four possible approaches to the federal process: screenings, comprehensive study, mediation and panel review. Several interviewees noted that community engagement must start before the project is defined and the EA process. A small number of participants offered the view that the EA should be a full panel review. Another suggested that while the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) public participation process would be OK, additional community engagement will be required.

4.4.18 Capabilities and nature of the implementing body

The community needs to have confidence in the implementing body. All must ensure accountability, responsibility and ongoing communication. The quality of their staff will be a major asset.

The project manager should be effective and credible, and a good communicator.

It was noted that each model option for the implementing body will bring specific challenges: a government department has direct political control; a Crown corporation must work with a diverse board of directors; and a private sector organization is profit driven.

4.5 Guiding Principles

The principles include: representation, openness and transparency, information, respect, honesty, inclusion, fiscal responsibility; accountability, trust and others.

Representation [also see Section 4.3.1]

Community engagement should ensure representation from a good cross-section of the community. If a group is formed, its members must have constituents.

Don't be afraid of special interests, they should not be allowed to dictate an agenda. Environmental groups are stakeholders, and deserve the same amount of time as others, no more or less. The community engagement process must focus on community goals and not private agendas.

The process should engage a good cross section of community interests and sectors -- health, business, academic, religious, environmental, close residents, labour, community groups, the Black community and others.

Openness and Transparency

A number of participants stated that project decisions should not be made in back rooms. Things should be done in the open, with all information available so that the community can understand what was done and why. The process must be open and transparent, and be seen to be open and transparent.

Information

Accurate, timely, and accessible information is considered by many of the interviewees to be an absolute requirement. The implementing agency must let people know what is going on. The community must have timely answers to questions and concerns.

There should be a free flow of information: easy access; available to the community in a timely manner; ability to get the views of the community.

While some suggested that there can never be too much information, others felt

that when there is an excess of information it becomes difficult for the public to absorb it.

Honesty

This means that all of the participants in the process are able to speak openly and with candor -- information to the community from the implementing organization, and information from the community to the implementing organization.

Honesty in both directions is an important factor. It is directly related to the trust and credibility of all involved.

Respect

Interviewees felt that there are a number of ways in which respect is demonstrated in community engagement. Respect is shown when feedback is provided, communication is direct, comments are acknowledged and questions are answered. Community engagement must take place in a respectful environment. Stakeholders are treated equitably, and their comments and views are acknowledged and valued.

Inclusion

Several interviewees suggested that the implementing organization should err on the side of being accessible to more rather than fewer individuals and sectors of the community. Use a stakeholder data base to identify and understand the diversity of stakeholders, use multiple techniques for engagement. Ask the various sectors and interests of the community what methods work best for them, and what the implementing organization should know about them to ensure effective engagement.

Fiscal responsibility

The project and process should be streamlined and cost efficient; the community engagement mechanism should not be expensive, or an end in itself. Get out good quality communication products, but keep the design work reasonable. Spend money wisely on things that are important and provide value.

Accountability

As noted in section 4.2.3, there are several ways in which accountability must be understood in relation to the project and community engagement. Government Ministers and senior department officials are accountable to the public and taxpayers for their policy and funding decisions; the implementing body is accountable for the effectiveness and efficiency of project implementation and expenditures; if a community committee is formed, its members may be accountable to their individual organizations to represent the views of constituents and keep them informed. Lines of accountability must be clear for each aspect of the project.

Trust

Building trust start with small steps; do it gradually. Trust will be built by using community feedback. There must be trust for aspects of the project handled by consultants. Provision of timely and accurate information in an important factor, as well as honesty in communication. Monitoring feedback will be especially important. The implementing organization must demonstrate that monitoring is effective and open; real time results would go a long way toward building trust. Feedback needs to be multifaceted. Trust is built when information is provided by a credible organization. Providing the community with real time monitoring results can be effective in building trust.

Other suggestions for key factors and principles included:

- clear, realistic expectations
- leadership
- must be forward thinking and responsive
- consistency -- rule structure, open so people can see what is going on
- make resources available to the community
- restorative justice - the steel plant left a legacy of pollution and the process must make up for that. Can the cleanup contribute to the community?

5. Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this report is to organize and synthesize the large amount of information obtained from 22 interviews of groups and individuals. From that synthesis we would like to conclude by highlighting some of the most widely held views expressed by participants.

- It is essential for governments or a responsible organization to **continue to inform and engage the community** after September 18th, 2003, regardless of what else is happening in the process. Allow no gap in communication and engagement.
- While there is a strong desire for the community to be kept informed, there is also a strong desire to **get the cleanup done**. This is seen as a key not only to the economic well being of the community, but to its image and self-esteem. The community is ready for the professionals to take action, make decisions and get the job done.
- **The community wants to be kept informed** about the details of the project, especially those that relate to health, safety and the environment. In general information must be accurate, timely and sufficient.
- Some form of **community liaison or advisory committee should be formed** as part of the community engagement process. It should be small, mostly seating representatives of community groups and sectors with a high degree of legitimacy. At the least it should be used for two way information flow. There is potential for a higher degree of involvement depending upon the external circumstances, the details and timing of the project and the needs and desires of the community and the implementing organization.

- The community is diverse. The new model should be designed to **use a range of mechanisms to match the diversity of the community**. Where possible stakeholder preferences should be honoured. There seems to be strong support for mechanisms that involve person-to-person engagement.
- There are **minority voices in the community that must be heard**. If they cannot be accommodated within a group such as a liaison committee, the implementing body should consult with them to identify a suitable approach. This may include those in closest proximity to the site, those who find it difficult to participate in public techniques, and those whose participation styles are not well suited to multi-stakeholder group activities or public fora. However, it is important that the implementing organization not lose the participation of the majority of moderate community voices by paying an undue amount of attention to the needs and agenda of a vocal minority.