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**SRS PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN WASTE MANAGEMENT  
HAS RESULTED IN EFFECTIVE DECISIONS SUPPORTED BY THE PUBLIC  
INCLUDING DISPOSAL CHANGES AND TOP-TO-BOTTOM REVIEW  
INITIATIVE CONSENSUS**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the Savannah River Site's (SRS') Solid Waste Management Program, a key to success is the Public Involvement Program. The Solid Waste Division at SRS manages the site's transuranic, low-level, mixed, and hazardous wastes. All decisions associated with management of this waste are of interest to the public and successful program implementation would be impossible without a vigorous public involvement program.

The SRS Solid Waste Division (SWD) and its Department of Energy (DOE) customer developed, implemented, and maintain a comprehensive public participation and communications program. It is staffed by public participation and technical specialists to ensure information is presented in a manner that is technically accurate while being tailored for understanding by people without a technical background. The program provides the public with accurate, complete, timely information and early meaningful participation opportunities. It also fulfills the public participation activities required by laws, regulations, DOE Orders, and negotiated agreements. The primary goal of the SWD Public Participation Program is to fulfill the objectives of the SWD and SRS Strategic Plans to "build trust and communicate openly, honestly, and responsibly with employees, customers, stakeholders, and regulators," and to "work to extend the support of external stakeholders for the pursuit of SRS and DOE Complex business goals."

This paper focuses on the public participation program goals, the implementation through formal plans and objectives, targeted waste management programs and specific audiences, and specific effects of the program on waste management activities. A discussion of the DOE and contractor teaming along with how plans are carried out is also included.

The effectiveness of the SRS Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) activities is discussed to allow focus of specific waste management activities and the public involvement process. Public Involvement in Incineration of Mixed Waste, Transuranic (TRU) Ship-to-WIPP, Top-To-Bottom Review Initiatives, and Low Level Waste (LLW) Disposal is also included.

## **Background**

In earlier years, SWD had minimal stakeholder involvement for its storage, treatment or disposal activities. Then in 1994, as public concerns about waste management practices at SRS evolved through the activities of the SRS CAB and other stakeholders, it became apparent that the concerns, primarily grounded in distrust of information relative to risk management and equity were significant and needed closer attention and scrutiny. In response, SWD recognized that in order to alleviate these concerns and build trust and communicate openly, honestly, and responsibly with employees, customers, stakeholders, and regulators, it was essential to develop a comprehensive public participation and communication program. In 1995, public involvement became an important and integral part of the way SWD conducts its business. Not only because program or regulatory changes were eminent, but also because of the manner in which DOE defined its expectations and definitions of success. And from 1996 to present day, as one of the major DOE-Savannah River (SR) focus areas, SWD continuously emphasizes the need to continue a strong relationship among the community, state and regulators.

SWD works primarily with the Waste Management Committee (WMC) of the SRS CAB and the Consolidated Incineration Facility Focus Group, as well as with members of the public to address health effects and risk related to SRS's waste management operations.

The CAB is comprised of 25 individuals from South Carolina and Georgia who are chosen by an independent panel of citizens from approximately 250 applicants. The board members reflect the cultural diversity of the population affected by SRS. The members, who serve two- or three-year terms, represent all walks of life, including the business world, academia, local government, environmental and special interest groups, and the general public. Two of the members specifically represent economically disadvantaged persons. The CAB also works with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region IV, and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC).

## **SRS Public Participation Team Organization**

Public participation is a collaborative process and at SRS the program is structured to include a team of subject matter experts, public involvement specialists, and other program professionals in addition to its DOE customer. This team ensures that information is developed and presented in a manner that is technically accurate while being tailored for understanding by people who lack a technical background. At SRS, citizen's interest varies with the issues, and many stakeholders choose to become involved in a particular waste management issue based on how they think they are affected. Their perception may be based on numerous factors, including education, economics, legal mandates, proximity (not in my backyard), or strongly held beliefs and values.

With these criteria in mind, the team first works together to identify those issues or topics that are of stakeholder concern and to determine eligibility for future discussion and stakeholder input. The issue or topic is then identified in an annual communication plan and scheduled for timely development and presentation. At SRS, a definitive public participation and communication plan is a significant attempt to accomplish what is in actuality, a “blueprint” that not only needs top-down management support, but also needs to include recommendations on how SWD intends to reach its objectives.

### **Objectives**

At SRS, those team recommendations develop the right tools to:

- Solicit the public’s help in identifying waste management problems and issues and the environmental, economic, social and cultural values that relate to those problems and issues.
- Solicit the public’s involvement in identifying a full range of alternative approaches for addressing those problems and issues, facilitating conflict resolution and working toward the development of broad-based consensus, both on SWD’s objectives and how to achieve those objectives.
- Increase public understanding of our complex environment, the legal, regulatory, political, technical, funding, and resource constraints SRS faces and the need to balance a variety of interest and consideration.
- Coordinate, integrate, and communicate information about SRS’s public participation activities such that the public is not confronted with multiple, overlapping or disconnected participation opportunities.
- Provide a range of SRS’s public participation opportunities tailored to meet the needs and interests of various segments of the public.
- Provide the public with timely feedback on how and why its input was or was not incorporated into the DOE-SR decision-making process.
- Fulfilling the letter and spirit of legal, regulatory, negotiated, and policy requirements of legal processes such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA), the Comprehensive Response Liability and Compensation Act (CERCLA), and in many cases, DOE Order 435.1 “Radioactive Waste Management” as well as other DOE and Executive Orders.

### **Program Activities**

The SWD team delegated to reach its objectives strives to support program activities ranging from coordination of long-term planning activities such as “Ship to WIPP” to the initiation and review of technology development or deployment, waste minimization and pollution prevention, and other significant programmatic issues.

In 2002, public participation in Solid Waste Division (SWD) activities accelerated along with the Savannah River Site Environmental Management (EM) Program Performance Management Plan (PMP). The PMP reflects the Site’s 2020 Vision to complete EM missions and transform SRS fully to a site focused on National Security. The PMP

outlined specific actions that DOE is taking to accelerate the SRS Cleanup Program to 2025, while targeting an even more aggressive objective of achieving cleanup by 2020. The SRS Vision applies innovative cleanup reform approaches to accelerate both cleanup and risk reduction, reduce the life cycle costs of the EM program and enhance Homeland Security.

The groundwork for implementing Top-to-Bottom approaches had been laid at SRS. However, once again, the public and the SRS Citizens Advisory Board (CAB) played an important role in 2002 to ensure that appropriate measures had been taken to address the innovative approaches. Implementing decisions that stick is dependent on upfront stakeholder participation in decision-making, including reaching agreement with regulatory bodies on cleanup strategies and specific technical solutions. During the year, the Solid Waste Division built on its established processes for stakeholder involvement, including the CAB, to ensure all affected stakeholders had an opportunity for input into the decision-making process.

In February 2001, the SRS CAB attended the first public meeting on the PMP where it heard about the Site's Cleanup Reform Initiatives, as well as SWD's initiatives to accelerate cleanup. The two SWD initiatives included:

- Accelerated shipping of low activity transuranic (TRU) waste to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) by 20 years, which reduces the risk of storing that material at SRS and saving the site \$700 million, and accelerating risk reduction associated with high activity TRU waste stored at SRS, as well as expediting the schedule to ship this waste to WIPP by nine years, thus resulting in life cycle savings of \$840 million
- Implementing a new stabilization technology for PUREX waste treatment that reduces the risk posed by this waste by completing its treatment ten years earlier than the current commitment. This approach also enables early closure of the Consolidated Incineration Facility (CIF) and provides treatment for PUREX waste contained in F Canyon.

The CAB strongly endorsed both SWD initiatives. In the case of accelerating TRU shipments, the CAB's helped to elevate the program from that of a "bit player" at a site level, to becoming a major player in the National Transuranic Waste Program. Undoubtedly, the CAB's three recommendations on TRU waste in 2002 had a significant impact on the Ship to WIPP program at the national level. With the introduction of the National TRU PMP, which is an aggressive strategy designed to reduce risk and challenge individual sites within the DOE complex to develop innovative strategies; the CAB saw firsthand the fruits of how the technically supported risk-based plan to enable cleanup and closure was implemented. Instead of the 12 planned shipments of SRS's TRU waste to WIPP in 2002, a total of 16 shipments were made, increasing the number of scheduled shipments by four.

Another example of stakeholder involvement is the work of the CIF Focus Group, which had been chartered to track work on alternative treatments and technologies for PUREX legacy waste. SWD began a system engineering evaluation in mid 2000 to determine if there were viable alternatives to restarting CIF. In addition to the technical and cost

analysis studies performed on each identified alternative, a separate study was performed to determine the technical improvements required to increase the throughput rate of legacy PUREX at CIF and to reduce its operational cost. In 2002, through the efforts of the CIF Focus Group, who followed the studies closely and agreed with the findings, the CAB sent two recommendations to DOE supporting the selected stabilization process under consideration at SRS.

Concerned about the technical issues of disposal of non-compacted waste, specifically potential long-term subsidence of the soil cover in the E-Area trenches, the CAB asked SWD to further evaluate the potential cost savings of disposing non-compacted wastes versus the increase in the costs of treating subsidence and consequently the long-term costs of closing the trenches. As a result of this request, the CAB recommended that DOE investigate alternatives to B-25 disposal containers, which included the possibility of direct shallow-land burial of appropriate low activity, low level wastes. The recommendation also asked SRS to investigate alternatives to reduce the subsidence repair costs; evaluate alternative capping strategies; evaluate alternatives to optimize land utilization; and provide the long-term public health and environmental impacts for each strategy. While the CAB heard briefings in response to its requests, the group asked that SRS continue to further investigate alternatives to B-25 disposal containers. The group's interest in SWD activities indicates that providing our stakeholders, both CAB members and the public, with valuable program information as an integral part of ensuring they have basic, timely, and firsthand knowledge of SRS's waste management operations.

### **Conclusion**

Solid Waste public involvement continues to grow each year. In order to facilitate the growing need for public participation, SWD plans to continue providing information about DOE requirements and give examples of the activities required under the Solid Waste program, as well as those suggested activities that serve to augment regulator requirements. As our stakeholders attend meetings, in turn they will continue to provide significant insight and offer opinions that assist in the DOE decision-making process.