

DEC's North Pole Sulfolane Investigation Communication Plan August 2012

Objective

The objective of the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Communication Plan is to facilitate sustainable and interactive avenues of communication that educate the general public while determining the public's information needs and addressing concerns about the project – the investigation and remediation of soil and groundwater contamination related to the Flint Hills Resources refinery in North Pole.

To accomplish DEC's objectives, the department participates in the Risk Communication subgroup, which is a component of the project's Technical Project Team. The Risk Communication subgroup captures the overall message points derived from the technical discussions and, using a variety of communication tools, translates pertinent technical information to the public. The subgroup works collaboratively with all involved state and federal agencies, and other stakeholders involved in the sulfolane investigation. In addition to DEC, the subgroup has representatives from Flint Hills Resources, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) and a DEC contractor, Grady and Associates.

DEC's Communication Plan is a multi-faceted program, which includes:

- A website outlining current details and progress on the project.
- Web and mail updates sent to community members registered on the DEC Listserv or on DEC's mailing list.
- Public surveys, implemented during key phases of the project, which discern public sentiment, concerns and/or issues.
- Public workshop and open house events.
- Quarterly community newsletter updates.
- Fact sheets.
- Radio interviews.
- Stakeholder liaison efforts that update local and state officials, and others interested in the status of the project.
- Published call-in numbers direct to DEC offices.

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

Sulfolane Information Website

<http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/north-pole-refinery/>

DEC created a website that's dedicated solely to the project, and it is updated with the most current information on the project. Web access provides a convenient way for stakeholders to review the status of the project. Anyone wishing to gain information on the sulfolane investigation is free to access this information at any time.

At this site, citizens can:

- sign up to receive notifications on project milestones
- view frequently asked questions from the public and answers from technical experts involved in the project
- participate in occasional public surveys that solicit input on facets of the project
- view current plume maps of the North Pole area
- download documents

Listserv, email or mail updates

All new and interested people have the ability to sign on to the DEC Listserv and receive emails with the most recent information posted to the sulfolane website:

http://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/north-pole-refinery/email_sulfo.htm

Those without Internet access or who prefer mail can contact DEC to receive the same updates via mail.

Public Surveys

Public surveys are implemented during key phases of the project to discern public sentiment, concerns and/or issues. Focused and appropriate resources are then applied toward answering the questions and sentiments gleaned from the public's responses. Survey results are posted to the website.

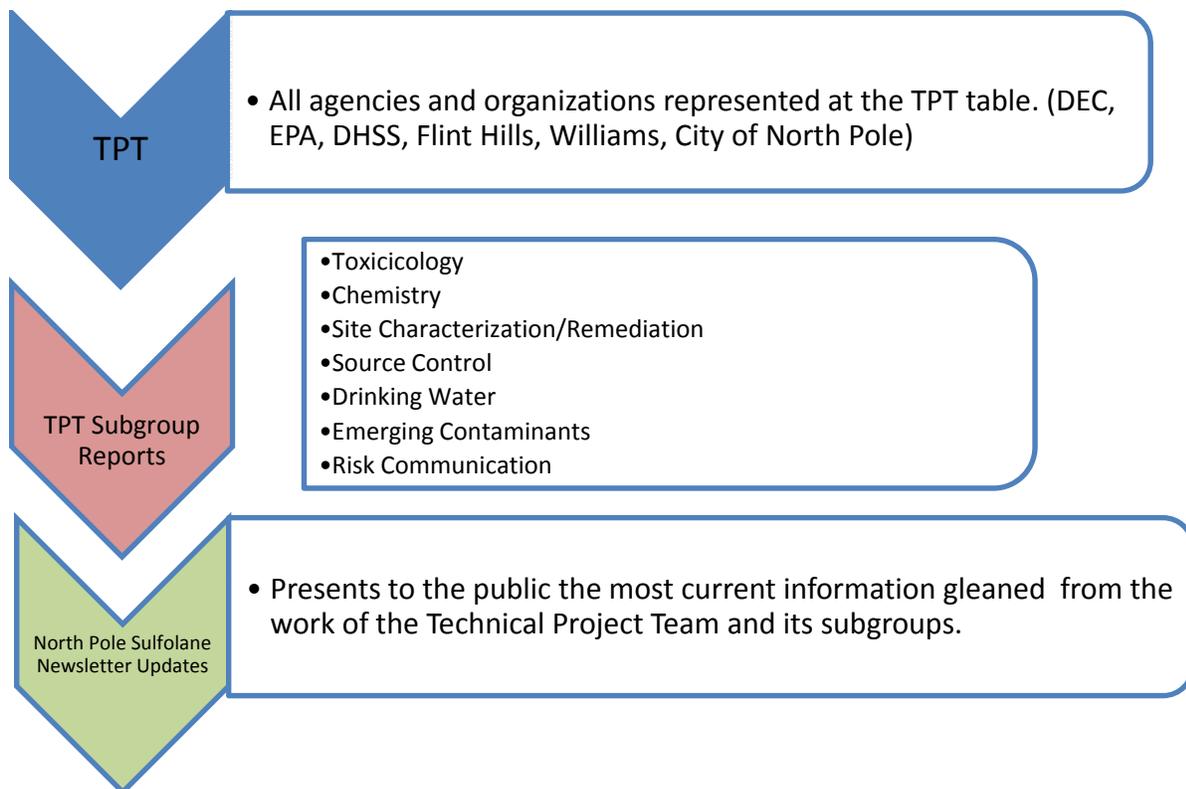
Those without Internet access or who prefer mail can contact the DEC to receive the same surveys via mail.

Open House/Workshop Events

The open house and workshop events provide a forum where community members can meet and talk one-on-one with appropriate technical and regulatory officials and learn about important information regarding the project. Open houses and workshops are publicly advertised and open to anyone with an interest in understanding specifics about the work of the Technical Project Team.

Quarterly North Pole Sulfolane Newsletter Updates

The most recent and relevant aspects of the project, as discussed at the Technical Project Team, will be communicated and distributed to the community via community newsletters. The team incorporates the work of seven specialized subgroups who apply their members' expertise in various technical aspects of the project. This information is consolidated and presented for review in the North Pole sulfolane update newsletter.



Fact Sheets

The complex nature of specific aspects of technical work is often best translated to the public in a fact sheet. A fact sheet clearly sets out technical information in a way that is concise and understandable to the lay public. It serves as a resource to both educate and assist the public in understanding technical decisions and their implications.

Radio Interviews

What makes radio particularly appealing as a communication tool in technical projects is its interactivity in a managed setting. Its ability to promote and disseminate accurate information, solicit from and answer questions to the public, and encourage dialogue from local populations and affected stakeholders makes it a powerful tool. It is a reliable, reputable and versatile vehicle for information management and is a commonly used communication tool in both rural and urban Alaska.

Stakeholder Liaison Efforts

Community involvement assists in developing trust in both the process and the project officials, and communicates important information to and between community members.

- **Liaison Efforts between DEC and the North Star Borough and North Pole Mayors**
The DEC Public Information Officer plays a key role in building working relationships between the Technical Project Team, DEC project manager and elected officials. It is important that these officials understand the most current technical information as they play a key role in disseminating information to the public. By keeping these key individuals updated, we ensure that correct information is being relayed to the constituency.

Timeline *Stakeholder engagement is appropriate during all aspects of this process.*

Yearly:

- Community Web survey.
- Evaluation and update of the Communication Plan.

Twice Yearly

- Radio interviews.
- Open house/workshops.

Quarterly

- Publish and widely distribute the project newsletter.
- Stakeholder updates with elected officials.
- Evaluation of communication tools.

Monthly

- Updates to the website.

On an “as needed” basis, per suggestions from the Technical Project Team and the Risk Communication Subgroup

- Press releases.
- Fact sheets.

Success Measures

A key component for measuring the success of a communication plan is the development of evaluation criteria. The risk communication subgroup will test the effectiveness of the communication pieces listed in this plan as they are delivered to the public. Feedback is solicited to determine which tools are successful and where changes or additions to the plan are necessary.

DEC Public Relation Efforts November 2009-June 2012

- ❖ November 2009: DEC holds its initial public meeting in North Pole. Representatives from DEC, Flint Hills Resources and DHSS participate.
- ❖ January 2010: DEC establishes a group email list (similar to a Listserv) to update stakeholders on the investigation of sulfolane in their drinking water wells. The agency begins collecting names and contact information at the Nov. 23, 2009, public meeting, and continues at each meeting after that. The updates are sent out via email, and by U.S. mail for the people who don't have Internet access or who prefer mail. From January 2010 to September 2010, the updates are often sent out weekly.
- ❖ January 2010: A comprehensive DEC website on the sulfolane investigation is begun. The website includes a Frequently Asked Questions column, based on input from the community. New questions and answers are added to the column periodically.
- ❖ January 2010: DHSS issues a fact sheet – “Sulfolane Health Fact Sheet.”
- ❖ February 2010: DEC holds a second public meeting to review the sulfolane investigation and the recently released DHSS “Companion Guide to the ATSDR’s Health Consultation on Sulfolane.” The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry’s “Health Consultation – Sulfolane” was also newly released. Representatives from DHSS, Flint Hills Resources and DEC participate in the meeting.
- ❖ February 2010: DEC issues a fact sheet – “Update on Sulfolane Cleanup.”
- ❖ March 2010: The DEC Technical Project Team is formed and convenes every six weeks to address the investigation and remediation of the plume.
- ❖ April 2010: Technical briefings for North Pole and Fairbanks area legislators, and the City of North Pole, detailing current work on the investigation, are begun and held regularly.
- ❖ April 2010: DHSS issues a fact sheet – “Community Health Concerns about Sulfolane.”
- ❖ May 2010: A community open house is held reviewing the Technical Project Team’s current work and findings on the sulfolane investigation.
- ❖ May 2010: DEC briefs North Pole and Fairbanks area legislators and mayors.

- ❖ August 2010: DHSS issues a fact sheet – “Results of the North Pole Garden Sampling Project: Testing of Early Harvest Plants for Sulfolane.”
- ❖ August 2010: DHSS issues a press release – “Sulfolane levels low or undetected in tested North Pole garden plants.”
- ❖ September 2010: DEC briefs North Pole and Fairbanks area legislators and mayors.
- ❖ October 2010: DEC holds its second community open house to review the Technical Project Team’s current work and findings on the sulfolane investigation. DEC, Flint Hills Resources and DHSS representatives participate.
- ❖ November 2010: DEC briefs the Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor’s Office.
- ❖ December 2010: DEC briefs the Fairbanks North Star Borough’s Economic Development Commission and Mayor’s Office.
- ❖ January 2011: DHSS issues a fact sheet – “Final results of the Sulfolane Garden Sampling Project.”
- ❖ January 2011: DHSS issues a press release – “Tests results released from sulfolane garden project.”
- ❖ February 2011: DEC briefs North and Fairbanks area legislators.
- ❖ April 2011: The initial Technical Project Team newsletter, the 16-page “TPT Year in Review,” is published and sent to all interested stakeholders.
- ❖ May 2011: The DEC website on the sulfolane investigation is updated and made interactive.
- ❖ May 2011: A community workshop is held reviewing information on sulfolane’s effect on health from the DHSS, and the ATSDR’s newly released “Health Consultation – Sulfolane” (the agency’s second health consultation). DHSS, Flint Hills Resources and DEC representatives participate in the workshop.
- ❖ June 2011: DEC briefs Rep. Tammie Wilson on the project.
- ❖ June 2011: DEC posts on its North Pole sulfolane website a new round of Frequently Asked Questions about the project.
- ❖ August 2011: DEC briefs North Pole and Fairbanks area mayors.
- ❖ September 2011: DEC briefs Rep. Wilson and Fairbanks North Star Borough Mayor Luke Hopkins.
- ❖ October 2011: The second newsletter is published.

- ❖ January 2012: The third community newsletter is published.
- ❖ January 2012: DHSS issues its own health consultation, “Health Consultation – Sulfolane Plume in Groundwater: Evaluation of Community Concerns about Sulfolane in Private Water Wells, North Pole, Alaska.”
- ❖ January 2012: DHSS issues a press release – “North Pole sulfolane health impact evaluation released.”
- ❖ January 2012: DEC briefs Rep. Wilson and Sen. John Coghill.
- ❖ March 2012: DEC briefs North Pole and Fairbanks area mayors.
- ❖ April 2012: The fourth community newsletter is published.
- ❖ April 2012: DEC provides a Power Point presentation on the project to Rep. Wilson and Sen. Coghill.
- ❖ May 2012: A community open house is held to update the community on the project. Representatives from DEC, Flint Hills Resources and DHSS participate.
- ❖ June 2012: The project website is updated.
- ❖ August 2012: The North Pole Suloflane Investigation Communication Plan is evaluated and updated.
- ❖ August 2012: The fifth community newsletter is scheduled to be published either in the end of the month, or in early September.
- ❖ September 2012: The Frequently Asked Questions column is updated per community questions gleaned from the open house.