

**A Model Community Relations, Public Involvement and  
Public Relations Plan for the Portland Bangor Waste Oil Site in Wells, Maine**

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**Nomination and Application**

**Executive Summary --- The largest hazardous waste site in Maine used to be ten minutes from former President Bush's summer residence.** Located in the quaint tourist village of Wells, Maine, the Portland Bangor Waste Oil (PBWO) site sat for eleven years before remediation was attempted. Frustrations and skepticism ran high. Enter TRC, an environmental remediation company, who proposed a unique Exit Strategy™ and community relations and public involvement program. From June through December 2001, TRC engineers, Maine DEP and Armstrong and Associates worked collaboratively with the stakeholders on what the Wells Town Manager would call a "National Model" of how to do things right.

**V. 1.0. Describe how the project emphasizes creative or novel approaches**

Stakeholders increasingly insist on being involved in decisions that affect their communities. When they are not, they tend to go to the media or the courts and either venue ends up painting pictures of engineering companies that are not very pretty. Engineering firms are reluctantly beginning to understand the importance of doing comprehensive and innovative public involvement programs. Such a communications effort is critical to a corporation's success, especially when the company is also pioneering a new and innovative business strategy, as did TRC in its work at the Portland Bangor Waste Oil (PBWO) site in Wells, Maine.

When TRC offered to assume all liability of the site and its 2900 responsible parties, and insure the State against any future liability by providing an insurance policy, if the State would agree to collaborate with TRC to remediate the site in an efficient and effective manner, they knew they were not only advocating an exceptionally important new way of doing business that could possibly end the tangle of litigation around U.S. Superfund laws, they also had to be prepared to develop a workable partnership with the community in order to make the novel exit strategy work. After all, this site had sat for 11-years and had been characterized and studied yet no clean up actions had occurred. Frustrations ran high and stakeholders were on edge. Next to the business design, the TRC's senior management acknowledged the immense importance of an effective communications, community relations, and public involvement program and committed funding to ensure the success of this effort.

Dr. L. Darryl and Kay Armstrong, principals with Armstrong and Associates teamed with Dr. Paola Macchiaroli, TRC Project Manager to strategically plan, implement and continually evaluate the program. The program sought stakeholder advice and counsel, explained the proposed remediation techniques, involved the key stakeholders, and built rapport, trust and credibility within the community. Each component of this plan was continually evaluated and was measurable.

The challenge at this site was to communicate clearly and effectively while building trust, rapport and credibility between the TRC team and the stakeholders. Their concerns had to be heard and appropriately addressed. Previous attempts to communicate by the state had been less than successful. Skepticism about whether the state would collaborate with TRC was high. Work had to be started and completed in a timely manner. Some of the unique and novel approaches:

Established a series of informal "community coffees." Stakeholders met at convenient locations in their community and on days and at times they recommended to hear updates on

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the remediation work. This venue provided them a place to discuss their needs and concerns with TRC's project manager, who could address their concerns. These face-to-face coffees were instrumental in building trust and rapport with the neighbors to the site and local officials.

Contracted with Armstrong and Associates, a nationally recognized public involvement firm that was committed to helping TRC build a shared vision of success with the stakeholders. The company's expertise and experience brought an outside perspective to the planning, implementation and evaluation of the program that effectively represented the stakeholders' viewpoints. Armstrong and Associates interviewed the stakeholders and asked what their communications needs were and then designed a program to meet those needs.

Used a professional and experienced facilitator (Dr. L. Darryl Armstrong) to bring structure and focus to the televised public meeting.

Used an experienced administrator (Kay Armstrong) to bring organization and continuity to the program while continually evaluating each component to ensure that adjustments were made as needed. Ms Armstrong also helped TRC establish and track their public involvement budget.

Developed, implemented and evaluated a series of events and communications tools including: Fact sheets written in non-technical language; Visual materials, presentations, and posters; Video updates broadcast over cable television; One-on-one meetings with stakeholders to build rapport; Specialized briefings to local officials; Newsletters written in *USA Today* style and using lots of photos; News releases and feature stories submitted to the local media; Media tours and briefings; Facilitated public meeting broadcast over cable television; Community coffees to address specific stakeholder issues; Development of a user-friendly and community focused and inexpensive web site ([www.pbwo.homestead.com](http://www.pbwo.homestead.com)); and execution of a Closing out ceremony to thank the stakeholders for their cooperation.

**V. 2.0. What problem does your action, program, project or achievement address?**

The public involvement and communications plan integrated the planning and decision making of the TRC Project Manager Dr. Paola Macchiaroli while directly taking into account the needs, values and opinions of the stakeholders' communications needs. The objective of the public involvement plan was to communicate TRC's actions and decisions effectively and efficiently to the key stakeholders (the community leaders, "impacted" residents, interested constituents, the media, and the state regulators) while at the same time soliciting their input and concerns and integrating those into the overall project planning and management.

**V. 3.0 Cite the best verifiable evidence of significant achievement:**

TRC and Armstrong and Associates believe that the stakeholders' concerns should be listened to, addressed when practical and feasible and the outcomes of the deliberations communicated to them efficiently and effectively.

For example:

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- Stakeholders' concerns about truck traffic around the site led TRC to negotiate with the neighboring industrial park to use a haul road that mitigated the concerns about safety and truck traffic. TRC also pointed out to their subcontractor these concerns and they relayed that to the truck drivers. At the end of the project, neighbors around the site complimented the truck drivers on their courtesy.
- When it appeared odor might be a problem at the site, TRC immediately offered to house surrounding neighbors at a local hotel. Although no stakeholders accepted the offer, they expressed their appreciation.
- When it was anticipated that dust would be an issue, TRC required the contractors to wet-down all roads and access ways.
- When the Town of Wells was faced with disposing of its wood ash, TRC negotiated with Maine DEP and was able to use the ash in the soil-crete being made at the site. This saved the community, according to the Town Manager, at least \$100,000.
- The local cable channel was used to broadcast low-cost yet highly effective video updates to all cable subscribers in Wells, Maine. (Enclosed videotape documents these video updates, the stakeholders' viewpoints and opinions of the project, and the closing out ceremony.)
- The state regulatory agency was kept involved and provided oversight at every stage resulting in an effective working relationship between the corporation and the regulators.
- The project started on schedule and ended on schedule and on budget.
- The public involvement plan was implemented and stayed within budget despite adding several events and actions.
- No legal action was filed or even threatened.

**V. 4.0 Identify the action, program, project, or achievement beneficiaries**

- Environmental remediation work at the site started and ended on schedule.
- The stakeholders' involvement had a positive impact on the decision-making processes and their involvement did not result in adverse impacts. Rather, TRC's project manager built rapport and trust and even personal friendships through the process.
- Regulators and corporate representatives sustained functioning and collaborative relationships.
- The media stayed informed and involved and served as an informative and educational conduit to the public.
- Local leadership publicly commended TRC for work that the town manager calls a process that could become a "national model of how to do it right." The town manager was referring to the remediation work and the communications process.

**V. 5.0 Describe committed public/private implementation funding, monetary benefits, and cost savings from the action, program, project or achievement.**

- Among the benefits to the community has been the return of a significant piece of real estate for future use and development.

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- Site neighbors, who were concerned about property values and getting the site cleaned up after years and years of no action, are now satisfied and have publicly stated their satisfaction. (See videotape for documentation).
- The stakeholders now see TRC as a corporation that has a philosophy to “do the right thing using an innovative business strategy.” They are seen as a company who is dedicated to educating their stakeholders so they can understand a project in non-technical language. TRC worked diligently to build trust, rapport and credibility using a minimum investment of resources.
- Project management costs stayed within budget projections.

**V. 6.0 Describe unique features or methodologies not presented elsewhere.**

The use of this comprehensive public involvement plan opened a dialogue that allowed for early issue identification and resolution.

Interviews with the stakeholders to ask their opinions in advance of designing a public involvement plan and consultations with Armstrong and Associates resulted in developing a sustainable, cost effective, and measurable plan that stayed on budget and met objectives.

The use of an independent and neutral facilitator provided TRC, Maine DEP and the stakeholders a venue to begin an effective dialogue.

The use of the various communications tools, specifically oriented to the identified stakeholders' needs, allowed for a continuing stream of communications and feedback and helped build rapport and credibility between TRC and the stakeholders. In other words, the stakeholders told TRC and Armstrong and Associates what their communications needs were and they met them.

The TRC project manager possesses unique communication skills. In addition to being a competent hydro geologist and project manager, she was also a skilled communicator that could be easily coached and was willing to do what had to be done to communicate efficiently and effectively with the stakeholders.

**V. 7.0 Please indicate if there are any pending legal actions concerning the project/achievement/methodology, etc.**

None.

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