

Summary: 2013 Vapor Intrusion Stakeholder-Involvement Forum

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March 19, 2013

For four hours on Monday afternoon, March 18, 2013, U.S. EPA sponsored the *Vapor Intrusion Stakeholder-Involvement Forum: Improving Communication, Outreach, and Decisions at Vapor Intrusion Sites*. Approximately 30 people attended in San Diego. Another 175 took part via Webinar. For full audio recordings and slides, see <https://iavi.rti.org/WorkshopsAndConferences.cfm> .

Henry Schuver of EPA made a brief introductory presentation. Ten community stakeholders, diverse in background, perspective, experience, and geography, presented remotely. I finished the event with a live presentation.

Schuver expressed concerns about: 1) the improbability that conventional assessment methods would “catch” vapor intrusion; 2) how long-lasting assessment efforts can only extend exposures; and 3) the typical lack of community involvement in the decision on whether to continue assessment efforts or take preemptive actions to prevent vapor intrusion.

Lisa Riggiola, a former Pompton Lakes, New Jersey city councilwoman and leader of Citizens for a Clean Pompton Lakes, described the TCE contamination emanating from the DuPont site there. More than 500 homes sit above the plume. She expressed dissatisfaction with the slow pace of cleanup, called for property tax relief, and explained that members of their community had won the right to hire their own, approved contractors to test and mitigate the vapors in their homes.

Rich Cowan, from Dracut, Massachusetts, told how hundreds of youth practiced baseball indoors at the former Navy Yard Mill site in that community, in a building with unacceptably high levels of volatile organic compounds intruding from the subsurface. He explained how difficult it had been to obtain information about the site. He displayed documents showing unacceptable exposures to TCE and PCE in indoor air in 2007, but he explained that the Future Stars baseball facility was not closed until 2012.

Robert Alvarado and Eduardo Lopez, from San Antonio, Texas described a predominantly Mexican-American community underlain by TCE and PCE from former Kelly Air Force Base. They reported that residents and workers are systematically excluded from participating in decisions that affect their lives: They are intimidated by police, removed from public meetings, not given translation, and not provided access to public information. In response the Southwest Workers Union and the Committee for Environmental Justice Action worked with researchers to design a vapor intrusion study, implemented by trained residents, to use passive samplers to measure for vapor intrusion.

Ken Deschere, of Ithaca-South Hill Industrial Pollution, Ithaca, New York described the TCE contamination from the Morse Chain/Emerson Power Transmission site. He explained how the New York Department of Environmental Conservation considered residential sampling results to be private. So his wife went door to door collecting that data, and a community volunteer compiled the results on the Web. That way the neighbors could understand how the toxins were moving down the hill and know where they were and what patterns were being found.

Lisa Baldwin, a member of the Buncombe County School Board in Asheville, North Carolina described how the School District plans to construct a new high school in its administration building complex, a former Square D electronic plant downhill from a volatile organic compound plume from the remaining Square D property. She said the boundary of the plume is not well defined, and she asked: "What would you do if you were asked to put students on this property?"

Jane Horton lives on the edge of the Middlefield-Ellis-Whisman (MEW) Superfund Study Area in Mountain View, California. She retold how she was denied vapor intrusion sampling in her home because the TCE plume was drawn in the street in front of her house. She also reported that other residents of her neighborhood may be impacted by a newly discovered arm of the MEW plume. Finally, she covered several scenarios to explain why residential property owners may be reluctant to authorize testing on their property.

Andy Williams, of Watertown, New York described the difficulty he and his neighbors have had obtaining information about TCE contamination from the New York Air Brake site. He called for a public database of sampling results to create an atmosphere of responsibility and accountability. He said that testing once and walking away leaves the most vulnerable at risk when science drives standards down.

Bob Moss from Palo Alto, California told how new construction projects in contaminated areas of Palo Alto were not subject to the same requirements imposed in adjacent Mountain View. He attributed this to the fact that the Regional Water Board, not EPA, is the lead regulator of the Superfund sites in question. Moss reported, "The only time vapor barriers and indoor air sampling has been required for a new building in Palo Alto was after I spent years demanding that it be a condition of project approval."

Dave Ogren talked about the CTS site near, Asheville, North Carolina. He recounted how regulatory agencies repeatedly ignored warnings from residents about the contamination. Today, a family living just downhill from the site, with health problems potentially connected to their documented exposures to TCE from the CTS, want indoor air sampling. However, EPA is unwilling to proceed

with just an access agreement. Instead, said Ogren, it wants a permanent easement to operate on the neighbors' property, something the family is unwilling to provide.

Albert Elkerson formerly rented space at 2350 Fifth Avenue, Harlem, New York. This building was originally an ice cream factory built with cork and foam. Then an on-site dry cleaner released PCE into that insulation, as well as the subsurface. In the late 1990s a school opened and closed quickly there because of the fumes. Now it's primarily an artists' workspace. Contractors working for the property owner, regulated by New York State, were remediating the space without notifying the building's occupants. Elkerson showed how the landlord renumbered the building, making it difficult to learn that it was a State Superfund Site.

Finally, I summarized the nationwide failure of responsible parties and regulators to notify building occupants of vapor intrusion investigations and potential risks. I laid out a series of principles for public notification, noting that information about sampling is necessary, in part, because "Occupants may wish to make personal decisions to avoid exposure, whether or not required by regulators." I also argued that continuous, real-time monitoring is necessary at TCE sites where short-term exposures (of pregnant women) are a concern because of the potential for cardiac birth defects.

While each speaker spent time providing background about their sites and several raised other issues, there were three recurring themes:

- People have a right to know when they are or might be exposed to elevated levels of TCE, PCE, etc., but they don't always get the information they seek.
- Many communities distrust agencies based upon past performance, and they wonder about inconsistencies in regulatory policy.
- Groundwater contamination is not always adequately characterized, so some people are exposed to vapors without anyone knowing that there is even a potential problem.