

Use of Media to Communicate Site Risks and Potential Future Use: The Ambler and Bo-Rit Case Study

Edward Emmett (emmetted@pennmedicine.upenn.edu) (University of Pennsylvania, Perelman School of Medicine, Philadelphia, PA)

Britt Dahlberg (bdahlberg@sciencehistory.org) (Science History Institute [formerly Chemical Heritage Foundation], Philadelphia, PA)

Zackary Biro (zbiro@sciencehistory.org) (Science History Institute, Philadelphia, PA)

Fran Barg (fran.barg@uphs.upenn.edu) and Michael

Anderson (michael.anderson2@uphs.upenn.edu) (Superfund Research Program, Philadelphia, PA)

Bill D'Agostino (bill@act2.org) (Act II Playhouse, Ambler PA)

Background/Objectives. Community acceptance and appropriate future uses are key to the long-term sustainability of remediation projects where a considerable amount of contaminant is left in place. We have been studying and providing information and advice to the recently completed Superfund remediation project at the BoRit asbestos contamination site located in Ambler Borough, and Whitpain and Upper Dublin Townships in Pennsylvania. Early EPA activities at the site met with considerable community suspicion.

Through surveys, observations, and approximately 30 in-depth interviews of a broad range of stakeholders we gained information on the communities' perceptions, attitudes and knowledge to understand the meaning of the site to the community, which was then organized into subject domains. In many domains there was little difference in the views of the varied participants. Interviewees were all quite aware of the potential hazard from asbestos and demonstrated basic environmental health literacy. However, in two domains, risk perception, and views as to appropriate future uses for the site, there was a very large range of opinions and expressed positions.

To facilitate constructive rational exchanges leading to acceptable compromise among stakeholders we explored use of the medium of theatre to inform debate, and open up space to discuss the environmental issues within the context of local history and hopes for reuse.

Approach/Activities. We worked with the Award-winning Act II Playhouse located in Ambler commissioning 12 playwrights to create one-act plays dealing with asbestos issues the community. Playwrights had access to all oral histories, but were given a different set of a few in-depth interviews as a starting point. Writers submitted 13 plays narrowed down to the 7 plays "The White Mountains" performed on two evenings to packed audiences at Act II Playhouse each followed by a discussion and responses to questions by a panel consisting of community residents, project team members, and government environmental health scientists. A subset of three one-act plays was presented at the Annual Superfund Research Program meeting in December 2017, to investigators and community and research staff from universities and government agencies.

Various tools including surveys and in-depth histories were used to evaluate the impact of viewing the plays. The second production was videotaped to allow further uses.

Results/Lessons Learned. Detailed results from the evaluations will be presented. Particularly remarkable was that the theatrical presentations allowed attendees to hear and understand

reasons for the different attitudes and views of other stakeholders which may have made it easier to develop successful compromises.

In August 2016 EPA awarded the BoRit CAG the inaugural “National Notable Achievement Award for Citizen Excellence in Community Involvement”. Award candidates had included all brownfields, superfund sites, RCRA, underground storage tanks, and federal facilities. The White Mountains won the 2015 Philadelphia Geek Award in the In-Real-Life category (www.phillygeekawards.com 2015 IRL Project of the year).