

7/11/02

Memorandum to: Work Group Members  
From: Daniel Hirsch, Barbara Johnson, Shel Plotkin

At the last meeting of the SSFL Work Group, there was an unfortunate disruption from the audience, particularly from two individuals, one of whom had lost her father who had worked for many years at the site. The proximate causes of the problem at the WG meeting were multiple:

- inappropriate behavior by a couple of members of the audience,
- triggered in part by some provocative statements made by one or more agency representatives on the panel, statements viewed by some in the audience as insulting, plus
- inadequate opportunities during the meeting for formal brief comments from the audience
- and ineffective meeting facilitation.

Running behind these immediate causes was, of course, the longstanding backdrop of repeated commitments by the agency representatives on the panel that have not, in the eyes of many in the community, been fulfilled. These commitments are related to cleanup of radioactive and chemical contaminants, and thus are literally life and death matters, contributing to longstanding frustration by the community with the agency representatives.

Relatively simple steps can be taken to reduce the prospect for repetition of the problems at the last meeting. We identify them here. However, we wish to make clear that if instead of attempting to resolve the problem of unreasonable outbursts from the audience, agency officials attempt to use that episode to impose measures aimed at preventing scrutiny and criticism of their actions by the community representatives on the Work Group with regards to the cleanup, such efforts will be strenuously resisted.<sup>1</sup>

Democracy has at its core the responsibility of government officials to face the public, have their actions scrutinized and be subject to criticism. That is at the center of our form of government, and is a primary component of the public quarterly Work Group meetings. We can understand why agency officials who have made promises to the community that are subsequently broken may not like having to appear before that community and explain why they have not carried through on the commitments made, nor to face the frustration and even anger that the community experiences in the face of these broken pledges. But that is what democracy is all about. Fundamentally, if agency officials do not wish to face the disappointment of the community, they should not reverse promises made to the community about the cleanup. If the agency officials, however, feel free to make such reversals, they should not be exempt from facing scrutiny and criticism by the community and its representatives.

With that all said, relatively simple steps can be taken to avoid repetition of serious disruptions from the audience, and an Action Plan to the end follows.

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<sup>1</sup> In that regard, we note with dismay that the draft action plan distributed earlier this week by USEPA, and which appears indeed to be aimed at barring scrutiny and gagging criticism of agency representatives regarding the cleanup by community representatives on the Panel, was prepared by EPA and the agencies with the community representatives excluded.

## ACTION PLAN

1. A minimum of three separate opportunities for formal public comment from the audience will be scheduled into the agenda of each Work Group meeting, with the first such public comment opportunity occurring within the first hour of the meeting. This will provide members of the public with an avenue for expressing their views on the matters being discussed and the cleanup and should reduce incentives for interruptions from the audience.
2. Agency representatives shall refrain from statements that are likely to be perceived by the community as insulting or are likely to provoke disruptive responses from the audience.
3. Any member of the audience who nonetheless is disruptive shall be asked to save their comments for the public comment period. After a second disruption, a second request shall be made, with a warning that if there is a third disruption they will be removed from the audience. If there is a third disruption by the same individual, they will be so removed. This provision is focused on serious disruptive acts, however, and not the occasional laughter, groan, or other audible expression that is not seriously disruptive.
4. Improved facilitation of the meetings will be attempted.
5. All parties are frustrated because we rarely complete the full agendas. This is due largely to meeting cancellations and delays resulting in having less than the minimum four Work Group meetings per year, so that the lesser number of meetings must address larger numbers of issues. The meetings will return to a strict minimum of four per year, and there will be additional meetings scheduled initially to free up the backlog of past agenda items.
6. Agency representatives shall strive to make their presentations as fully informative as possible, avoiding filling space with generic organization charts and vague statements, trying instead hard to provide the public with as much detailed information about the cleanup as possible. All efforts should be made to not appear to be withholding important information.
7. Agency representatives making presentations at the Work Group meetings shall transmit to all Work Group meetings all written material and data supporting their presentations so that members receive that material at least two weeks before the meeting. Failure to comply shall result in not being able to make the presentation.
8. Agency representatives shall arrange that a minimum of one complete set of all documents about SSFL received by or generated by the agency is promptly transmitted to at least one Community Representative of the Work Group so that the community representatives can be kept apprised of developments regarding the site and perform their function on the panel effectively.
9. Agency representatives shall fulfill commitments that they make.
10. Agency representatives shall take into account the reasons for the frustration by the community and take appropriate actions related to the cleanup to relieve those frustrations.