

Community Engagement At Leaking Underground Storage Tank Sites*

**Community engagement activities at LUST sites vary, depending on site conditions and remedies.*

National Historic Voting Rights Trail Selma To Montgomery, Alabama

History And Site Activities

Since 2009, Alabama's Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and EPA are working closely with local communities and citizens living along and in the vicinity of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Voting Rights Trail to envision and realize a local community vision for revitalization that is consistent with national historic site goals. The Trail runs through Dallas, Lowndes, and Montgomery Counties and is a pivotal civil rights location that commemorates events, people, and the route of the 1965 Voting Rights March. It begins in Selma and continues along U.S. Highway 80 to West Montgomery. Unfortunately today, the route is a 54-mile corridor of high unemployment, health issues, lower educational and economic achievements, and severe rural isolation.



Drilling activities at a former Gulf station located along the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Voting Rights Trail

There are many active and former gasoline stations along the Trail that have the potential to cause contamination from petroleum leaks. One example where ADEM and EPA are addressing contamination is a former Gulf service station on Oak Street in Montgomery in an area bordered by mixed light commercial and residential properties. This was formerly a retail gas station and is currently used as a car detail shop. This site has petroleum contamination that dates back to at least 1986 or earlier, and in 1986 four 3,000 gallon gasoline tanks were removed. There are concerns about soil, groundwater, and possibly petroleum vapor contamination in surrounding residential neighborhoods. Site investigation activities are going on now. Groundwater monitoring and risk assessment activities are next, with cleanup activities to be completed in late 2011. ADEM intends to clean up the site to a level protective of human health and the environment, which will allow for a greater range of property uses.

ADEM and EPA are conducting site assessment activities for other petroleum and hazardous waste properties along the corridor. To date, EPA has provided 18 Targeted Brownfields Assessments along the Trail. Combining targeted involvement and leveraging other federal and state resources, ADEM and EPA can facilitate community based revitalization, environmental benefits, and economic development activities along the corridor.

Community Engagement Activities

ADEM and EPA, along with a number of state (such as the AL Department of Revenue and Historic Commission) and federal agencies (such as the Army Corps of Engineers, National Park Service, Housing and Urban Development, Department of Agriculture, Federal Highway Administration, and U.S. Geological Survey), are collaborating with local communities along the Trail. Federal and state partners recognized that involving local government and communities was important for determining if the project was viable and focusing limited resources. Mayors, other elected officials and non-governmental groups are participating in these discussions. Since spring 2010, Federal Agencies continued to meet with local communities and their leadership to continue revitalization efforts. Meetings have been held in Hayneville, Montgomery, and Selma, with more meetings planned for additional communities. A Sustainability Workshop is planned for Selma in September 2010, to provide further information about available technical assistance and grant resources for these communities.

Two months prior to the initial meetings with community members, ADEM and EPA hosted a pre-meeting for other state and federal agencies involved to encourage participation in and familiarize them with the vision-to-action session process, a technique to help stakeholders create and develop their ideas. The pre-meeting was critical to gauging the level of interest from state and federal agencies and obtaining other agencies' views on existing community issues. It was also an effective way for ADEM and EPA to communicate their goals for the project and provide support for cleanup planning efforts that connected community members with resources for development and reuse.



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State and federal government agencies organized, provided support for, and invited affected citizens and community members to participate in eight vision-to-action sessions. The sessions were held on three separate days during different weeks to maximize community participation and focus attention on various community areas. Local community contacts were instrumental in identifying meeting locations (such as churches and community centers), dates, and times – this was critical to obtaining community involvement. Because a significant segment of the community did not have internet access, meeting flyers were posted and hand-delivered to citizens. This extension outreach worked; citizens of many ages, including a police chief, local emergency management director, and minister, as well as long time residents participated in the vision-to-action sessions.

At these sessions, citizens shared their improvement ideas (signs to community and historic resources); community economic development plans (reusing abandoned gas stations for craft and gift shops, luncheonettes, and farmers markets); and additional ideas (bike trails connecting nearby communities to the Trail, new parks, and shopping venues). EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers provided artistic support. An artist compiled multiple drawings – which incorporated citizens' ideas – into a community vision which helped citizens communicate their community reuse visions to developers, elected officials, and others.

These sessions were a positive experience for citizens and local, state, and federal agencies in working together to identify reuse options and plans for the affected communities. Because of that, stakeholders are continuing to work together on other development projects, such as improvements to water resources, transportation, and education.

Community Engagement Lessons Learned

- **Prepare early** – introducing local, state, and federal agency stakeholders to the approach and obtaining their involvement early is critical to success
- **Use multiple opportunities to meet with communities** – this allows for maximum participation from interested citizens
- **Ask for the community's help** – community members have valuable information and ideas to bring to cleanup solutions and reuse of sites



Local community visioning session at one of the sites along the Trail

For More Information

[Alabama LUST Recovery Act Program](#)

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[EPA Region 4 UST Program](#)