

## Summary: March 2014 Vapor Intrusion Stakeholder Forum

Lenny Siegel  
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On Monday afternoon, March 17, 2014, U.S. EPA's Vapor Intrusion Stakeholder Forum took place at the AEHS West Coast Conference at the Mission Valley Marriott in San Diego. Approximately 30 people took part on site and another 35 to 45 participated via online streaming and chat. The video is now available at <http://new.livestream.com/mediaartssd/AEHS-EPA> which can be accessed through <https://iavi.rti.org/WorkshopsAndConferences.cfm>.

The 2014 Forum for the first time centered on role-playing exercises, modeled after a similar session at EPA's 2013 Community Involvement Conference in Boston, MA<sup>1</sup>. There were three role-playing scenarios:

- 1) Five "regulators" knocked on doors of homeowners and renters, establishing first contact and seeking cooperation in a vapor intrusion investigation.
- 2) Five "regulators" returned to homes with initial indoor air sampling results and based on those data, explained next steps such as further sampling or mitigation or in one case, the monitoring of an existing mitigation system.
- 3) Jim DiLorenzo of EPA Region 1 led a mock community meeting, presenting slides on a fictitious site and taking questions from the public, which included designated role-players as well as the audience at large.

Role-players included state and federal regulators as well as others with experience at vapor intrusion sites. In general, they offered brief but detailed explanations of the vapor intrusion investigations, their purpose, and their consequences. After each scenario, there was open discussion.

Though only the session organizer was a public stakeholder, the experience of other participants conveyed messages derived from real-world experience. Lessons learned included:

- There's a lot to explain in very little time. When people are contacted in their homes they have a limited attention span. Those who knock on their doors need to be succinct, and they need to develop trust quickly to avoid being sent away,
- It's difficult to describe vapor intrusion responses in plain English. Audience members noted the uses of terminology, such as "groundwater plume" and "multiple lines of evidence," unfamiliar to the typical resident.
- People have questions (health, property values) that regulators are not prepared to answer. "Regulators" tended to deflect questions on the health impact of past

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/ciconference/>

exposures, instead providing contact information to other officials with expertise in that area. Also, they avoided answering questions on the impact of vapor intrusion on property values, in part because there is little or no such evidence and in part because it's not in their job description. Health and property values are typically among the first things that homeowners and other residents worry about when confronted with a vapor intrusion investigation.

- Plans for re-visiting sites are not clear. On the presentation map at the mock community meeting, there were several homes that had not been sampled because owners had chosen not to cooperate. When asked how EPA would notify and protect future owners, the presenter explained unsampled properties would be identified during the Five-Year Review. When an audience member suggested that five years is too long, an EPA project manager in the audience explained that they try to catch property turnover when it happens, but that they do overall reviews of protectiveness as part of the five year reviews.
- Residents are frustrated by the length of time it normally takes to provide sampling results. After all, they are told they are breathing substances that cause cancer and birth defects.

This was the first Vapor Intrusion Forum or Workshop that used live streaming. Particularly because only a small portion of the session involved slide presentations, the video seemed useful and cost-effective. Sound quality could be improved, and perhaps with preparation the camera could be turned more to point to commenting audience members, instead of remaining focused on the stage (or a second camera could be used). The video is available online, allowing those who missed the session to experience it later.

Finally, the session might have been more convincing if real public stakeholders—such as residents and other building occupants at vapor intrusion sites—could have taken part. This would require travel support, which may be difficult to come up with in this era of tight budgets.

### **Door-Knocking Scenario Volunteers**

Gloria Appiah, Hohai University  
Jim DiLorenzo, U.S. EPA Region 1  
Carolyn Hunter, Tetra-Tech EMI  
Alana Lee, U.S. EPA Region 9  
Efrem Neuwirth, California Department of Toxic Substances Control  
Ed Olson, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency  
Kelly Pennell, University of Kentucky  
Henry Schuver, U.S. EPA RCRA Program  
Shukla-Roy Semmen, California Department of Toxic Substances Control  
Lenny Siegel, Center for Public Environmental Oversight  
Nitya Timalisina, University of California at San Diego