

## REPORT: COMMUNICATIONS

### Background

In September 2006, the Environmental Management Advisory Board (EMAB) issued a report to the Assistant Secretary that contained recommendations pertaining to communications. These recommendations were approved and implemented to varying degrees.

- **Recommendation 2006-06:** Establish a permanent position to provide the needed communications role in the Office of the Assistant Secretary.
- **Recommendation 2006-07:** Incorporate communications into all aspects of decision-making.
- **Recommendation 2006-08:** Incorporate a communications element or standard to performance appraisal plans for key managers, especially field managers.
- **Recommendation 2006-09:** Measure the effectiveness of current communications tools.
- **Recommendation 2006-10:** Ensure that timely and adequate information and responses are provided to local, state and tribal governments. Similarly, ensure timely responses to recommendations from Site-Specific Advisory Boards and other stakeholders.

The EMAB Communications Team comprising Ms. Jennifer Salisbury, Ms. Lorraine Anderson, Mr. A. James Barnes, and Mr. Tom Winston, has continued to monitor EM's communications initiatives in addition to the implementation of EMAB's recommendations throughout the past year.

### Discussion

The most significant of EMAB's communications recommendations directed EM to establish a permanent communications position in the Assistant Secretary's immediate office (Recommendation 2006-06). EM implemented this recommendation in October 2006 when political appointee Mr. Bobby Carr joined the program as the Senior Communications Advisor. Additionally, the Board understands that an office, tentatively titled the Office of Communications and External Affairs, is under development, the director of which will be responsible for strategic communications planning.

The Board also recommended incorporating communications into all aspects of decision-making (2006-07). This must be an ongoing effort and is a challenge for any organization. Communications must be paramount in everybody's thinking, similar to the integration of safety as a stalwart of EM's organizational culture. EM may want to consider incorporating communications into its compliance score card.

Integration is further accomplished through the incorporation of a communications element in key managers' performance appraisals (Recommendation 2006-08). As of Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, a communications element was included in the program's Senior Executive Service appraisals; a similar element will be included in all of the managers' appraisals beginning in FY 2008. EMAB applauds the implementation of this component, which ties communications to career development and performance; however, the Board stresses that such an element must be meaningful to be effective.

EM must measure and monitor the effectiveness of its current communication tools (2006-09). How well do the program's sites, offices, and individuals communicate with each other? How can communication be improved?

Based on its members' professional experience, the Board dialogued and suggested a number of methods and creative communications tools during its September 13 public meeting in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Specifically, EM should consider reviewing the following current and proposed communications tools:

- Quarterly Employee Messages
- EM Employee Portal
- Employee Surveys
- Interactive Program Updates

Lastly, EM must continue to improve its communication with stakeholders. EMAB has recommended that EM ensure that timely and adequate information and responses are provided to the program's advisory groups and stakeholders (Recommendation 2006-10). While EM has improved in this respect, this is an area that will require continual monitoring. Program officials should continue to informally poll stakeholders during EM Site-Specific Advisory Board (EM SSAB) and Intergovernmental Groups meetings as to how well EM communicates. Not only will this aid EM in obtaining feedback, but it also sends the message that the program cares and wants to improve its communication.

EMAB will continue to monitor EM's communications efforts and is prepared to advise on future initiatives, especially as the Office of Communications and External Affairs begins to take shape. The Board commends EM on its many recent communication successes.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 2008-06: Continue to increase and improve internal communication through the use of creative communication tools and methods and measure the effectiveness of the program's current practices.**

Suggestions for Implementation:

- Quarterly Employee Messages

- The Board agrees that the Assistant Secretary’s quarterly employee messages, delivered via email, are valuable and widely appreciated. EM could capitalize on this effort by increasing their frequency.
- Furthermore, EM could use this opportunity to further promote its complex-wide successes and incorporate employee recognition as a cost-effective method to improve morale.
- Employee Surveys
  - Regular, anonymous employee surveys distributed electronically may help measure the effectiveness of EM’s internal communications. EMAB suggests that surveys be used and collated by organizational units, which will allow EM to examine trends over time.
- Interactive Updates
  - Building on the Assistant Secretary’s employee email messages, EM should explore the use of interactive program updates styled after town-hall meetings (via video teleconference), or regular conference calls. Similar tools may include pre-recorded voicemails that provide updates, in addition to responses to employee questions and concerns submitted in advance.
- EM Employee Portal
  - Although usage of the EM Employee Portal has recently increased and remains under review, the Board does not believe that this tool is as effective as it should be. EM must analyze what inhibits its use and make adjustments as necessary.
  - Part of the solution may be to reassess the criteria for material available on the Portal. Perhaps only that material which truly needs to be protected should be posted on the Portal, while the remainder should be made available via EM’s public website, [www.em.doe.gov](http://www.em.doe.gov).

**Recommendation 2008-07: Continue to actively monitor external communications with the stakeholder community and general public.**

Suggestions for Implementation:

- Utilize forums such as the Intergovernmental Groups, EMAB, and EM Site-Specific Advisory Board public meetings to solicit feedback on EM’s external communications. Informal polling will help EM gauge its own success while simultaneously conveying a sense of openness and willingness to improve.

**Recommendation 2008-08: Further promote EM’s programmatic successes both internally and externally.**