

## **WINNER**

### *Brookhaven National Laboratory*

#### **The Mission**

Brookhaven National Laboratory, a U.S. Department of Energy laboratory founded in 1947, is situated on 5,300 acres in the Pine Barrens of Suffolk County on Long Island. The Laboratory's mission is to create and operate major facilities and to make them available to university, industrial and government personnel for basic and applied research in a variety of scientific fields, from physics, chemistry and materials science to biology and medicine. The Laboratory has over 3,000 employees, and each year over 4,000 visiting scientists come to conduct research at Brookhaven's large and unique facilities.

#### **The Challenges**

In 1989, the Laboratory was added to the National Priorities List because of historical chemical and waste management practices, and on-site soil and groundwater contamination. In 1996, plumes of volatile organic compounds were discovered off site, and the Department of Energy notified neighbors in the area that they would be hooked up to public water as a precautionary measure, outraging that community. Then in 1997, an on-site plume of groundwater contaminated with radioactive tritium was discovered.

Following the 1997 discovery, the reaction from community members, activist groups, elected officials and the DOE was immediate and intense. Serious concerns in the Long Island community were raised about the Laboratory's ability to take its environment, safety and health responsibilities seriously, and DOE's competence as an overseer in the Laboratory's activities. The Lab's contractor, Associated Universities, Inc. (AUI) vigorously protested against stakeholders' reactions to the contamination, citing their technical assessment that "there is no public risk associated with the tritium plume" (U.S. Government Accounting Office). AUI failed to recognize the "social risk" inherent in the circumstances and underestimated the public's reaction to any level of radioactive contamination in a sole source aquifer.

The public's trust in Brookhaven National Laboratory was seriously eroded. According to a survey conducted in 1998, 60% of respondents associated the Lab with environmental concerns (e.g., groundwater contamination). Only 2% were aware that the Laboratory was conducting world-renowned research. Forty-nine percent did not trust Brookhaven's management to do the right thing, and 60% said the Lab did not provide timely information.

The Laboratory was in crisis. In an unprecedented move, DOE terminated the long-standing contract (50 years) with AUI. Brookhaven Science Associates won the new contract, which marked the beginning of plans to achieve culture change. In his first meeting with stakeholders, the new Laboratory Director announced that he had a strong commitment to community involvement and open communication and that he would begin implementing this commitment through organizational restructuring.

#### **The Organizational Plan**

One of the Director's first actions was to bring the communications, community involvement, and government affairs functions under one manager who sits at the policy-making table and who is a direct report to the Director.

Over the next 2 years, a community involvement policy and plan were written with input from the broad community, including internal and external stakeholders. For the plan, the Lab conducted research and provided a draft document based on good practices implemented at another DOE facility. The stakeholders worked together during task force meetings and a workshop to provide recommendations on how the Lab could best involve the community in decision-making processes. In addition, they provided clear guidance on how the Lab was to separate outreach from involvement activities. The guidance was included in the plan, feedback to all those involved in the process was ensured, and the documents were widely distributed.

The plan included a message from the Director, which stated, "the Plan assumes that responsibility starts with the Director and flows to each line manager and his or her direct reports. In this way, Laboratory activities that might have an impact on the community can be identified as they arise and conducted in appropriate interaction with interested community sectors."

Both the policy and plan laid the foundation for the activities that took place in FY 2000. Community involvement goals and requirements in organizational plans and individuals' performance agreements were included in all level I and II managers' roles, responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities. Internal stakeholders helped to write a procedure, which is included on the Laboratory's site-wide management system for policies, standards of performance, procedures and manuals. Included in the procedure is a checklist to help managers identify the need for community involvement while planning projects. Finally, the *Community Involvement and Laboratory Decision-Making: A Handbook for Managers* was written. It translates the community involvement plan and procedures into how-to instructions for identifying and addressing the need for community involvement. The book has been cited as a model by a peer group of nationally renowned community relations and communications experts, and by a communications expert working for the DOE Office of Science.

#### **Making the Plan Work**

Since a broad cross-section of the Laboratory's internal and external stakeholders were included in developing the policy, plan and handbook, many level I and II managers became aware of the changing focus on community involvement within the Lab. Presentations were made to everyone on the Laboratory organizational chart and to the staff of the Department of Energy, who also supported the processes, and manager training was initiated.

The responsibility for community involvement and Laboratory decision making has shifted from the community involvement staff to line management. Now community involvement staff participate on teams, which are formed for each issue or decision the community will have a stake in. The staffers provide guidance and direction to ensure community involvement plans are written and implemented, that managers are prepared to interact with community members, and that issues are effectively prioritized so that the community is not overwhelmed.

Simultaneously, a Community Advisory Council was formed consisting of 32 members, 24 of whom have alternates. Organizations

include civic, union, business, environmentalist, health, education and employee groups, to name some. The Council meets monthly to learn about issues and to provide advice to the Laboratory Director. This group has invested the time and effort needed to be valued contributors on tough technical issues facing the Laboratory management. Although there is a wide disparity of opinions among the members, the group has reached consensus on cleanup recommendations for groundwater, and on advice to split a record of decision on Peconic River cleanup—advice to which the Department of Energy responded. The Council is concerned about the Lab not being open to new technologies for River cleanup. Responding to that concern, in December 2000 the Lab, in partnership with the Department of Energy, hosted businesses from across the country so they could present their technologies for review by DOE, the Lab, regulators and the community. A follow up meeting will be held so community input may be incorporated into plans for possibly using some of those technologies in a proposed plan.

The Council has been an important and effective way for the Laboratory to involve the public. DOE Headquarters recognizes them as an effective and powerful group. The Director, Assistant Laboratory Director for Community Involvement, Government and Public Affairs, attend every meeting; they, and Lab managers, are attentive to all the proceedings of the Council and ensure their advice and perspectives are incorporated into decision processes.

Other public forums are also being used. A chartered working group meets to give input on plans for decommissioning and decontaminating the Brookhaven Graphite Research Reactor, the first reactor that was built for peaceful use of the atom. Initially, interviews and roundtables were conducted to determine stakeholder values. These values were recorded and are being used in all decision-making processes for this project. Working group members committed to following this process for two years, ensuring a technically and well-informed community are participating and advising on issues from transportation to the final disposition of the graphite core. By meeting monthly with managers responsible for the project, the working group sees first-hand how their input is being considered.

Over the last year the Laboratory has been engaged with stakeholders soliciting their input on developing a site master plan. Builders, developers, elected officials, representatives from civic and environmental groups, employees, and agencies such as the New York State Department of Transportation, to name a few, participated in a series of roundtables. The Lab sought to ensure it was cognizant of issues important to the community, and of the plans that were already in place by outside groups and agencies. Each of the concerns and recommendations were addressed in the plan and in some cases significant changes were made to the draft document to reflect the stakeholder input. For example, the community was clear that it would prefer the Lab not build off the scenic highway that runs adjacent to the Lab, and they advised that incorporating "green" buildings should be an important consideration.

The input regarding green buildings has affected Council activities, as well. The Council is undertaking an effort to educate the community about self-sustaining environments. They are hosting a series of public forums on energy and environment issues for Long Island. The Council hopes that at the end of these public forums they will be able to make meaningful recommendations to the Laboratory Director regarding possible research projects the Lab might undertake. In addition, the Council has indicated that they would work toward seeking additional funding for those projects. This undertaking is an indication that the Council is moving from

cleanup issues to using the Laboratory and the Department of Energy as resources.

Other issues have required different types of involvement. A cell phone tower was proposed to be built on site; the adjacent community was notified and their civic organization requested a balloon be raised to show the height of the tower. The cell phone company responded by stationing a 100 foot crane in the location of the tower. They notified the residents of its presence, and ensured the placement of the tower would be acceptable to the Lab's neighbors.

Additionally, formal systems for receiving and responding to requests for information and systems for providing feedback on community involvement efforts have been established.

Finally, the Lab initiated and enhanced community involvement programs that used employees to reach out to the community. Through face-to-face contacts, employees are developing relationships with key opinion leaders in the community, providing new channels for information to flow in and out of the Laboratory. Many employees live in the surrounding community and are involved in local community and civic groups. They have the same concerns as their neighbors about issues, but can share their knowledge to foster a better understanding of the Laboratory. Programs such as this, as well as the speakers bureau program, volunteer programs in the schools, and other educational and outreach activities are helping Brookhaven to build personal relationships in the community and to identify other key stakeholders. These informal mechanisms for communicating with the public have been implemented at the grassroots level and initial results indicate that both the employees and community members are supportive of this mode of communication.

Within all of the processes used to inform and involve the community, the Laboratory includes an evaluation and self-assessment component. Recognizing the importance of research to determine the effectiveness of activities, surveys and polling are being used more consistently. The performance-based management cycle to plan, do, check and change has been incorporated into the Laboratory's culture.

### Summary

Brookhaven Science Associates recognized the importance of involving the community in decisions that affect them; the Director of the Laboratory supported, and continues to support, mechanisms, systems, and management procedures that ensures this philosophy. Managers are observing that involving the community early and often in decision-making processes ensures that their programs are more likely to be on time and less costly. By involving those who have a stake in decisions, better decisions are being made.

Regulatory required external communications still continue at Brookhaven. However, new involvement channels for proactively seeking input from a wide array of interested parties have been established. Mechanisms to inform and educate the public have been expanded and utilize a variety of media to maximize exposure. A framework for involving the community in the decision-making process has been implemented and is starting to register positive results.

In December 2000 Brookhaven was given a "good neighbor" award by a local well-respected weekly newspaper. The article written about the award stated, "Community involvement is a significant part of what BNL stands for, and the reason they have been named the Good Neighbor of the Year for 2000." Additionally, the

man who serves in many capacities as a civic leader complimented the Lab's integrity and its attitude toward the public, stating "they have...been honest and have given me information in a straight manner." "They are open in accepting responsibility [whenever they make a mistake]." "They are great neighbors."

As BNL continues to deliver on its commitments and demonstrates improvement to their programs and performance, they are regaining the trust of their community members, regulators and elected officials. A holistic external involvement and communication program such as this has enabled Brookhaven National Laboratory to begin its journey back to reclaiming its world class status.

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