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# **Community Relations Plan**

for

# **Rio Grande Refining Superfund Site**

**This electronic version of the community relations plan is abbreviated. However more complete files are available as part of the Rio Grande Refining Superfund site repository**

at

**Sour Lake City Hall  
105 Ann Street  
Sour Lake, Texas**

and/or

**TNRCC Records Management Center  
Austin, Texas**

**July 1989**

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COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN

RIO GRANDE REFINING  
SOUR LAKE, TEXAS

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

JULY 1989

Contract: 68-W8-0112

TEX68032

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**Section 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

This Community Relations Plan (CRP) was prepared for the Rio Grande Refining Superfund Site in Sour Lake, Texas. The purpose of the CRP is to identify issues of community concern and provide a basis for establishing two-way communication between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the community during the Superfund study process. EPA and the Texas Water Commission (TWC) have negotiated an agreement with Potentially Responsible Parties (PRP's) to conduct the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS). EPA is responsible for developing and implementing the community relations program.

The CRP consists of four sections:

- o Section 1 - Introduction
- o Section 2 - Site Background and Status
- o Section 3 - Community Relations Background
- o Section 4 - Proposed Community Relations Program

This Community Relations Plan describes activities required to meet the provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Reponse, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as Superfund law, as amended by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986. The activities described in the CRP are tailored to meet the unique community involvement needs of those who live near the Rio

Grande Refining site. It has been developed in accordance with EPA guidance for conducting community involvement programs for Superfund sites.

In depth personal or telephone interviews with residents, community leaders, and state and local officials who are interested in site activities form the basis for the Rio Grande Refining CRP. In addition, background information for the plan was obtained through file research and discussions with EPA and TWC technical staff. As work progresses at the site, the plan will be reviewed and revised if necessary to reflect the community's changing public involvement needs.

Congress passed CERCLA in 1980 to correct the problems of abandoned or uncontrolled hazardous waste sites that threaten public health or the environment. One of the most important provisions of CERCLA is establishment of a tax on chemical industries, which goes into a trust fund called Superfund. Under the Superfund program, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency can pay for investigating and remedying problems at hazardous waste sites if those responsible cannot be found or they are unwilling or unable to pay. The law also permits EPA and states to require those responsible for the contamination to investigate and conduct remedial activities at their sites or reimburse EPA for doing the work.

The law authorizes EPA to initiate short-term removal actions when an immediate response is needed, and longer-

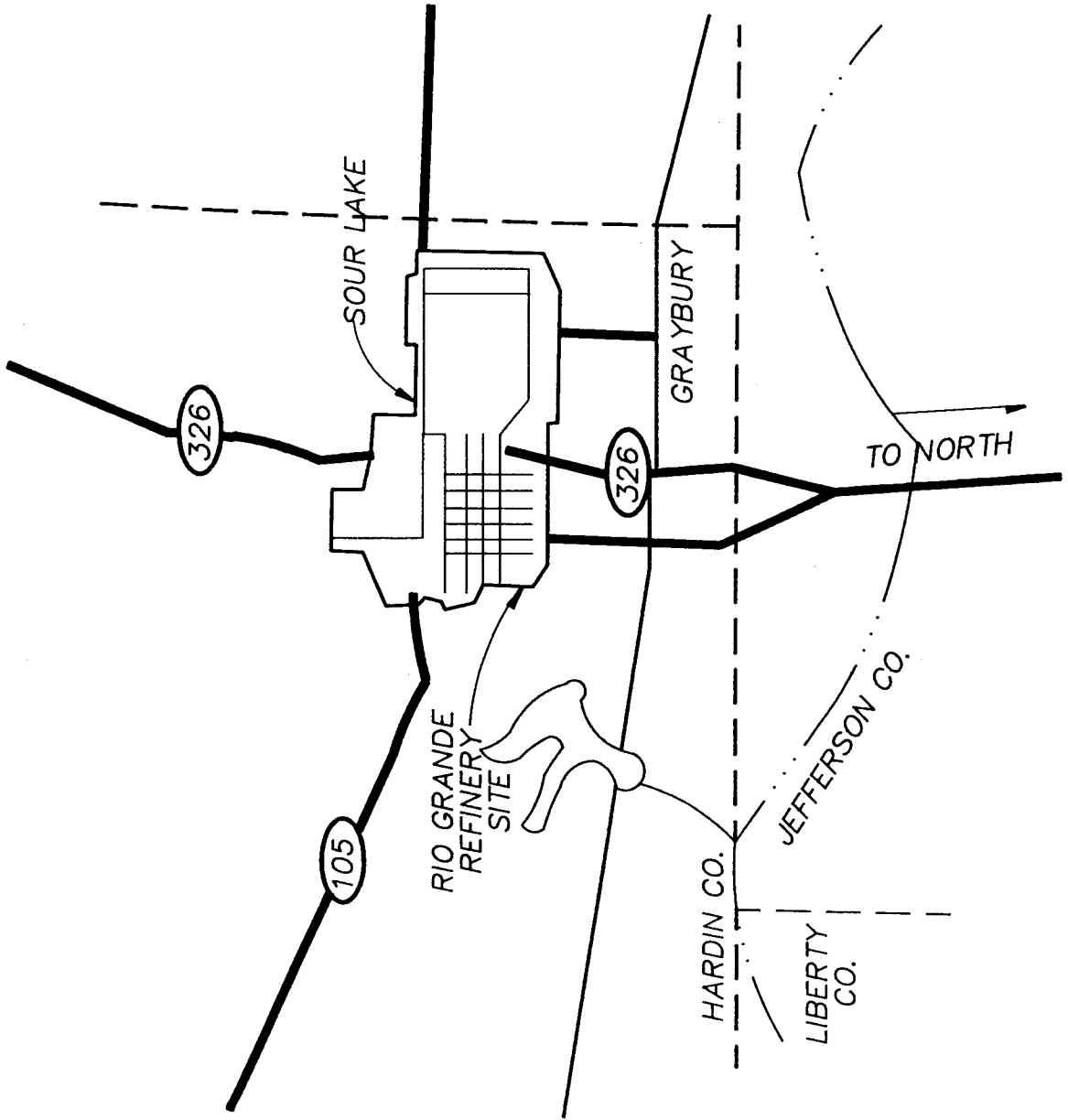
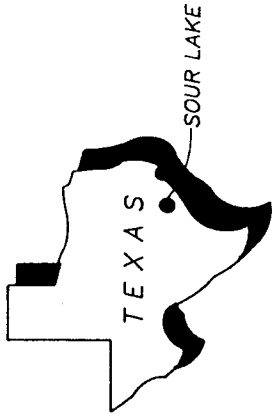


FIGURE 1  
SITE MAP

term remedial actions to remedy serious problems that are not immediate threats to public health and safety. The Rio Grande Refinery Superfund site is a long-term remedial action, although TWC supervised a removal action conducted by the PRP's in 1987. The removal action was undertaken to protect the public from potential exposure to contaminants.

, which is described  
in more detail on  
page 7,

Section 2  
SITE BACKGROUND

SITE DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The Rio Grande Refinery Superfund site comprises 11 acres west of Ann Street in Sour Lake, Texas, in the southwestern part of Hardin County (see Figure 2-1). During the late 1920's and early 1930's, the facility refined and processed crude oil. While the refinery was operating, liquid wastes resulting from the refining process were dumped in a 1-acre unlined pit in the northwestern portion of the refinery. These wastes hardened into a thick, tar-like substance.

The Rio Grande Refinery Superfund site currently is owned in part by AMOCO, Inc., and the City of Sour Lake. The site's former owner was Sinclair Refining Company, a forerunner of ARCO, Inc. Sinclair Refining purchased the entire property in 1932. AMOCO and ARCO are considered Potentially Responsible Parties. PRP's are individuals and organizations identified as having owned, operated, or in some other manner contributed to the wastes at hazardous waste sites.

The site lies over the Chicot aquifer, a geologic formation which is a source of drinking water for Sour Lake. Area soils are moderately permeable, and ground water can be found at depths of 10 to 20 feet. Two municipal wells serving the City of Sour Lake are located 6,000 yards from



the site, and approximately 2,000 people obtain their drinking water from public and private wells within 3-1/2 miles of the site.

### STATUS OF SUPERFUND ACTIVITIES

#### **PREVIOUS SITE ACTIONS**

Samples of soils taken from the disposal area in 1985 revealed the presence of phthalate esters and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH). These organic compounds frequently are produced as byproducts of a variety of petrochemical industry processes. In November 1987, the Potentially Responsible Parties removed visible contamination from the disposal area under the supervision of the TWC. Approximately 3,410 cubic yards of waste and soils were taken to an EPA-approved hazardous waste landfill in Louisiana.

In June 1988, EPA proposed that the Rio Grande Refinery be included on the National Priorities List (NPL) of hazardous waste sites, making it eligible for funding under the Superfund program. The NPL is EPA's list of the most serious hazardous waste sites identified for possible long-term remedial response.

In July 1988, the PRP's conducted a post-removal investigation. At that time, no PAH's were detected in soil samples taken from a depth of 10 feet or in ground water.

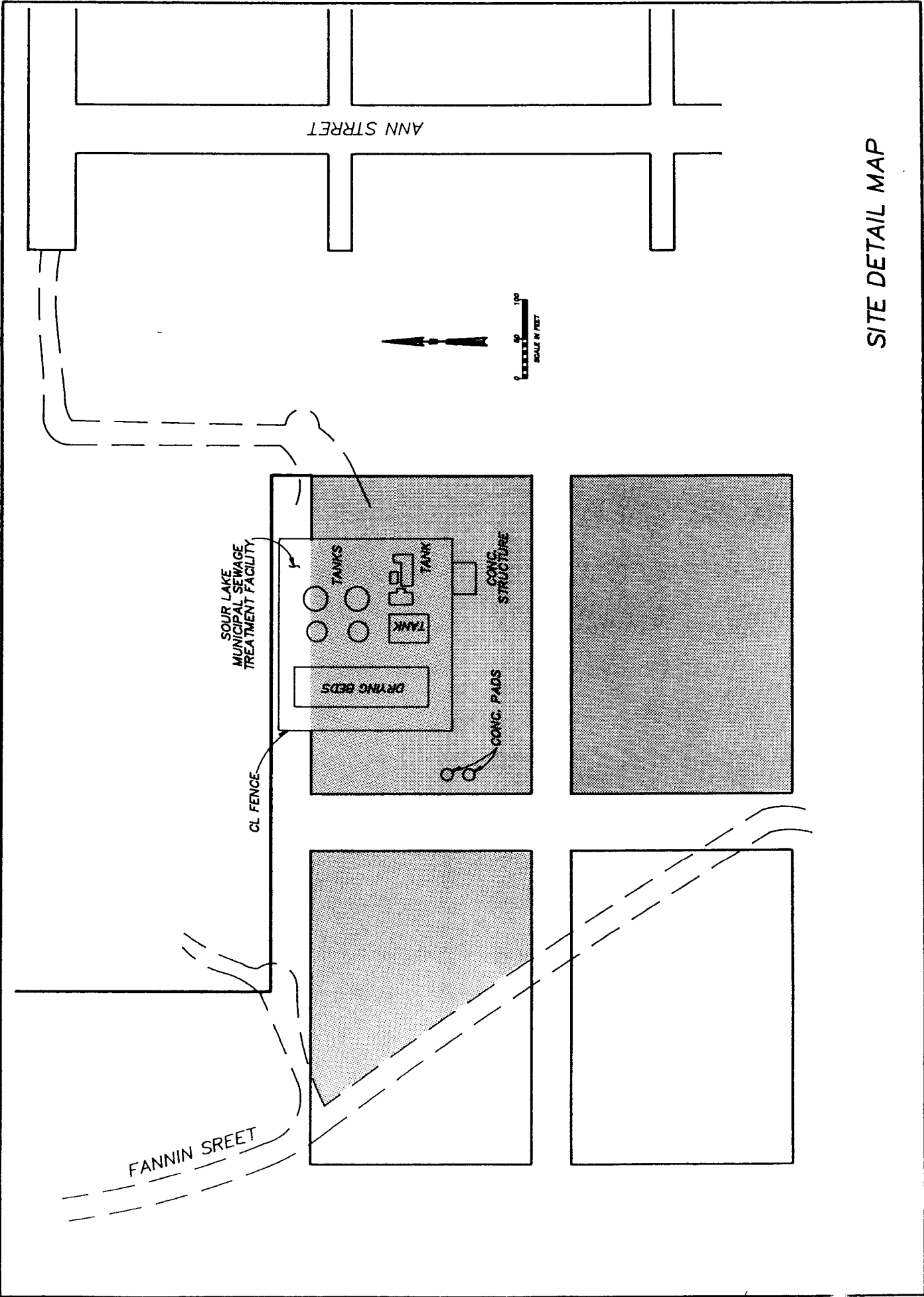
However, three ground water samples and one soil sample contained bis(2-ethyl hexyl), a phthalate ester compound.

#### CURRENT AND PLANNED ACTIVITIES

EPA, ~~the~~ TWC, AMOCO Production Company, and ARCO have negotiated an Administrative Order on Consent, which defines the responsibilities of the PRPs to conduct a phased Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study for the site. A work plan outlining the approach of the RI has been developed, and field activities are underway. Field work, which is scheduled to last until mid-1990, includes sampling ground~~/~~water, surface water and soils, subsurface soil, and sediments to define the extent and concentration of any contaminants. Results of the analysis of the samples is expected to be available in late 1990. Based on these results, a risk assessment will be developed to determine if the site poses a potential threat to human health or the environment.

EPA will use the results of the RI and risk assessment to develop a report called a Feasibility Study (FS). In the FS, EPA will evaluate a range of alternatives to reduce site risks, including one in which no action is taken, and propose a plan of action to deal with problems at the site. The FS is scheduled for completion the summer of 1991, and the public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the alternatives and the proposed plan. of action After considering all public comments, EPA will select the appropriate plan of Remedy ~~action~~ to protect people and the environment.

09/29/89



SITE DETAIL MAP

**Section 3**  
**COMMUNITY RELATIONS BACKGROUND**

**COMMUNITY PROFILE**

The City of Sour Lake is a small community 20 miles northwest of Beaumont and 76 miles northeast of Houston. The Rio Grande Refinery Superfund site is located in Sour Lake south of State Highway 105 between Ann and Fannin Streets. The site is fenced and is not easily visible from either road. A number of mobile homes and modest single family dwellings are located adjacent to the 11-acre site.

Agriculture and the oil industry provide the area's economic base, and many of the 2,000 people who live in Sour Lake depend in some way on the oil industry for their livelihoods. The refinery has existed in the midst of Sour Lake for nearly 70 years, and a number of residents interviewed for this plan recall playing in some areas of the refinery when they were children.

**COMMUNITY HISTORY**

Founded in 1835, Sour Lake is the oldest settlement in Hardin County. The city received its name from the sulphurous odor of a small lake north of town. The lake was fed by bubbling hot springs containing oil, sulphur, and other minerals. The waters of the lake were believed to possess medicinal powers, and during the last half of the

1800's, Sour Lake was a well known resort town, attracting thousands of people who came to drink the water, breathe the sulphur smell, and take mud baths.

In the late 1800's and early 1900's, vast reserves of oil were discovered in Texas, and the state experienced unprecedented growth. In 1903, the Texas Company (now Texaco) struck oil in Sour Lake, establishing the petroleum industry as a key force in the city's economy. Today, a number of the city's major employers are part of the petroleum industry.

## COMMUNITY ISSUES AND CONCERNS

### OVERVIEW

The Superfund process at the Rio Grande Refinery Superfund site has begun only recently, and those interviewed indicated that the site has not generated public controversy among local residents or attracted the attention of state, regional or national environmental groups. ~~To date~~

Community involvement in the site has been limited to some media coverage when the site was placed on the NPL.

Appendix A is a list of persons interviewed for this plan.

The entire site mailing list is contained in Appendix B.

## ISSUES AND CONCERNS

### Community Image and Development

Like many communities in the nation's "Oil Patch" that rely heavily on the petroleum industry, Sour Lake's economy has suffered due to the troubled domestic oil industry. As a result, the general concern expressed by residents, elected officials, and business people interviewed for this plan was that the presence of a Superfund site in Sour Lake might mar the community's positive image, cause problems for the petroleum industries that provide much-needed jobs for local workers, and hinder the city's growth and development efforts.

Many citizens of Sour Lake have spent most of their lives directly or indirectly involved with the petroleum industry, and one resident interviewed for this plan said that people in Sour Lake appreciate the contribution the petroleum industry has made to the city's economy over the years. He was one of a number of people who pointed out that community members are used to having all aspects of the petroleum industry operating in their midst, including oil drilling and refining, and petro-chemical processing. They do not find the refinery threatening or frightening.

Another local businessman and Sour Lake Chamber of Commerce member, who has lived all his life in Sour Lake, echoed this sentiment. He recalled that many years ago he and his friends played "cowboys and indians" at the refinery. Another

local citizen said he and his neighbors believe that the site is not really hazardous, and other larger, more heavily contaminated sites should be considered for remediation under the Superfund program before the Rio Grande Refinery.

Another resident did not understand why the site potentially needs corrective action of any kind. He was under the impression that any contamination problems had been solved by the removal action conducted by the PRP's in 1987.

A local businessman and Sour Lake resident who is particularly concerned that the community's quiet hometown image will suffer as a result of the Superfund site, said he wants to make sure that the information about site activities will not be "blown out of proportion," frightening residents or helping "stir up trouble" in the community. He stressed that informational and educational materials about the site should be written so that residents will be able to easily understand them, to avoid confusion and misinformation.

A number of businessmen questioned the fairness of requiring a company to help pay the cost of remedial action if the firm was not actively involved at the site when hazardous waste disposal or releases actually occurred.

### **Public Health**

The site's potential effect on public health and safety was not a major concern of those interviewed for this plan, although Sour Lake's City Manager said that ensuring the

safety of the city's water supply is important to the community. At this time there appears to be no immediate threat to municipal water supplies from contaminants that might be migrating from the refinery.

### **Knowlege of Superfund Process**

Citizens who provided information for this plan were interested in applying for a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) to hire a technical advisor to help them interpret technical information generated during the Superfund process. One resident said community members "want to be a part of the Superfund effort. They don't want the city to get a bad name courtesy of a Superfund site that isn't that bad to begin with." During interviews, residents asked a variety of questions about the TAG program including:

- o What groups are eligible for a grant?
- o Why is a group required to incorporate in order to obtain a grant? Must a group also have nonprofit status?
- o What criteria are used to grant waivers? What kinds of good or services can be used to help meet the grant's matching funds requirement?
- o Is the technical advisor permitted to disagree with EPA's finlings?



The need for information about TAG underscores an even broader need for information about the Superfund program in general. Involvement in the Superfund process is a new experience for most citizens who live in Sour Lake, and they will need detailed information about how Superfund works, as well as what to expect during the Remedial Investigation. For example, many citizens may be unaware that site investigations often take months to complete, or they might be alarmed by the protective gear--boots, coveralls, respirators--worn routinely as a safety precaution by workers taking soil or ground water samples.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Overall, those who contributed their opinions for this plan are concerned about their community's image and the effect a Superfund remedial action will have on the local petroleum industry and the business climate in general. As a result, they are eager for Superfund program activities to proceed in a timely manner, with as little publicity as possible. They indicated that they want to be kept informed about site activities and involved in decisions made about the site remedy.

Section 4  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

During the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study phases of the Superfund process at the Rio Grande Refinery site, EPA will conduct a community relations program that addresses the concerns and issues of importance to community members and fosters communication between the Agency and those interested in the Superfund program at the site. The Superfund program emphasizes the importance of community involvement, and the goal of the Community Relations Program is to provide citizens with ample opportunity to voice opinions and receive answers to their questions.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS OBJECTIVES

The objectives of EPA's community relations program are to:

- o Maintain open communication among the EPA; residents of Sour Lake; local, state and federal government agencies and officials; community leaders; and other interested individuals or groups.
  
- o Provide residents, agencies, local officials, civic leaders, and media with accurate, timely information about the Superfund process, progress of the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility

Study, and other crucial technical and administrative matters.

- o Cooperate with effective, existing communication networks, such as the Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations, to ensure that community members receive the information they need to successfully take part in the decision making process.

### **COMMUNITY RELATIONS ACTIVITIES AND TIMING**

The following community relations activities are suggested for the Rio Grande Refinery Superfund site.

#### **TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT**

An understanding of the technical issues concerning a hazardous waste site in their community helps citizens provide thoughtful, informed comments to decisionmakers considering proposed Superfund actions. The Technical Assistance Grant Program provides grants of up to \$50,000 to citizens' groups to obtain assistance in interpreting information related to activities at Superfund sites. EPA will provide interested citizens with information about the grant program, and if needed, assistance in completing the application.

## FACT SHEETS

Two fact sheets will be prepared during the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study. The first will provide an overview of the Superfund program and the Remedial Investigation. The second will provide detailed information about the alternatives EPA evaluated to manage contamination at the site and the Agency's proposed plan of action. In addition, the second fact sheet will announce the date, ~~time~~ *the comment period* and location of ~~the public meeting~~, and offer *an opportunity for a public meeting as well as* other opportunities for the public to become involved in the Superfund process. Fact sheets will contain clear, accurate descriptions of technical information prepared in a style and format that will encourage use and understanding. They will be filed at the information repositories, distributed to persons on the mailing list, and made available at ~~the~~ *any* public meeting.

## PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

EPA will announce a 30-day public comment period upon completion of the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study. The comment period will enable citizens to review and comment on the agency's proposed plan of action.

## PUBLIC MEETING

A public meeting is an effective way for the general public to give and receive feedback regarding site activities and issues. A general public meeting will be ~~planned~~ *offered* to



coincide with completion of the Feasibility Study and announcement of the proposed plan and accompanying public comment period. A news release and a fact sheet seeking comments from interested parties and <sup>Offer</sup> ~~inviting~~ the community <sup>to</sup> ~~to~~ the public meeting will be distributed immediately prior to the beginning of the comment period. <sup>Offer</sup> ~~The~~ public meeting will be held at a convenient location in the community, such as the Sour Lake City Hall or the Community Center.

### **RESPONSIVENESS SUMMARY**

EPA will prepare a responsiveness summary of the written and oral comments made by the public on key Agency documents and Agency responses to those comments. This summary will provide a clear record of community concerns about the site and indicate how EPA considered public comments in selecting the site remedy.

### **COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN REVISIONS**

The CRP will be revised during the RI/FS if the focus or intensity of community concerns change to ensure that the Agency continues to maintain effective two-way communication with the community about issues involving the site. Upon selection of a remedy, the CRP will be revised to address community involvement needs during remedial design and remedial action.

## **INFORMATION REPOSITORIES**

The information repositories, which are listed in Appendix C, are a valuable source of technical information about the site and the Superfund process in general. They will be updated as necessary with the most current information about site activities.

The following activities are suggested for the site depending on the Community's need for information and the availability of Agency financial and personnel resources.

## **ONGOING CONTACTS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

While remedial activities at the site progress, EPA staff will maintain contact with members of the community either by phone or in person. When appropriate, informal briefings can be held for elected officials and other community and civic leaders to keep them abreast of activity at the site.

## **NEWS RELEASES**

News releases that provide important information about site-related activities will be issued to the Hardin County News, the local Sour Lake newspaper, and to radio and television stations that serve the area. A news release will be prepared to announce the beginning of the public comment period for the proposed plan and as needed during the course of the work.

## **OPEN HOUSE**

An informal, face-to-face meeting with a small group of people is an especially effective way to communicate the complex issues surrounding a Superfund site investigation. EPA will hold an open house after the Remedial Investigation begins to provide residents, civic leaders, and public officials with up-to-date information about site activities and receive feedback from them, *if warranted*,

## **SITE VISITS**

If appropriate, EPA can conduct visits to the Rio Grande Refinery site for small groups of people. Site visits can enhance community understanding of the Superfund Program in general and the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study in particular.

## **SPEAKERS BUREAU**

EPA technical staff can meet the public's need for information by speaking to community, government, church, civic, educational and other groups about Superfund and the progress of technical activities underway at the site.



## COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM TIMEFRAME

Community relations activities are timed to coincide with technical milestones in the Superfund process or on an as-needed basis. The following is a schedule for Community Relations activities.

## SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Timing</u>
TAG Information, Assistance	Beginning of RI, As Needed
Contacts with Community Members	Ongoing as Needed
News Releases	To Announce Public Comment Period, and As Needed
Fact Sheets	1. Open House 2. Public Comment Period 3. As Needed
Update Information Repositories	As Needed
Public Meeting	During Public Comment Period for Proposed Plan
Speakers Bureau	Ongoing, As Needed
Open House	During RI
Site Visit	During Appropriate Time During the RI/FS
CRP Revisions	As Needed

Appendix A  
COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN CONTRIBUTORS

The following people assisted in the development of this Community Relations Plan by providing background information about site history and technical activities, or by sharing their concerns about the site with EPA and contractor staff responsible for researching and writing this plan.

Ursula Lennox  
Remedial Project Manager  
U.S. EPA  
1445 Ross Avenue (6H-ET)  
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

Robert Roundtree  
Remedial Project Manager  
Texas Water Commission  
1700 North Congress  
Austin, TX 78711

Ray Edmondson  
P.O. Box 326  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

J.H. Bennet  
P.O. Box 853  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

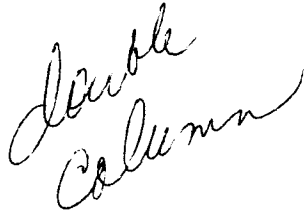
Robert Ewart  
City Manager  
City of Sour Lake  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Benny J. Herford  
P.O. Box 733  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Randy R. Copeland  
P.O. Box 287  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Jack W. Douglas  
Route 9, Box 1430  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Ken Pelt  
P.O. Box 1050  
Sour Lake, TX 77659



A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jack W. Douglas", is enclosed within a hand-drawn rectangular border. The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

Terry Radley  
P.O. Box 755  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

J. Howard Radley  
P.O. Box 336  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Fred Blanchette  
P.O. Box 49  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Merlin Breaux  
P.O. Box 51  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Bill Fregia  
Hardin County Commissioner  
P.O. Box 225  
Saratoga, TX 77585

Appendix C  
INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

U.S. EPA  
12th Floor Library  
1445 Ross Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75202-2733

Texas Water Commission  
1700 North Congress  
Austin, TX 78711

Sour Lake City Hall  
105 Ann Street  
Sour Lake, TX 77659

Texas Water Commission  
District 7 Field Office  
4301 Center Street  
Deer Park, TX 77536