

COMMUNITY RELATIONS PLAN

**ONALASKA MUNICIPAL LANDFILL
Town of Onalaska, Wisconsin**

**WA 01-5LL5.0
Contract No. 68-W8-0040**

October 24, 1988

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Section 1
INTRODUCTION

This Community Relations Plan (CRP) was prepared by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for the Onalaska Municipal Landfill Superfund site in the Town of Onalaska, Wisconsin, according to EPA guidance given in Community Relations in Superfund: A Handbook (Interim Version, March 1988). This CRP is designed to provide a framework for community involvement in the Superfund process at the Onalaska site. Based on community concerns and information needs identified in this document, the Onalaska community involvement program will feature an educational effort to promote understanding about site activities and offer community members opportunities to participate in the decisionmaking process.

The plan outlines community relations activities required to meet the provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA) as amended by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 (SARA). It also includes additional activities tailored to meet specific community involvement needs.

The body of the plan provides:

- o Site History and Background: location and setting, history of disposal, and site problems
- o Status of Superfund Activities
- o Overview of Community Involvement: a history of community involvement, identification of interested parties, and key community concerns and information needs

- o Overview of Community Relations Program: objectives of the Agency's community relations program, community relations activities, and techniques required and recommended for the Onalaska site, and a schedule for implementation

Background information for the plan was obtained through interviews with members of the community, including residents who live near the landfill, and through discussions with EPA staff and contractors and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) staff. As work progresses at the site, the plan will be reviewed and revised when necessary to reflect the community's changing communication needs.

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Section 2
SITE DESCRIPTION

The Onalaska Municipal Landfill is in LaCrosse County, Wisconsin, approximately 10 miles north of LaCrosse near the confluence of the Mississippi River and within 400 feet of the Black River. Several homes are located within 500 feet of the site, and a subdivision of about 50 homes is located 1-1/4 miles southeast of the site. The area is generally rural, and homes use the sand and gravel water table aquifer as a water supply (see Figures 1 and 2).

The 11-acre site was mined as a sand and gravel quarry in the early 1960s. In the mid 1960s the quarry operation ceased and the Town of Onalaska used the quarry as a municipal landfill. The landfill was capped with 2 feet of compacted clay during the period of 1980 to 1982. Two gates restrict, but do not entirely prevent, vehicular access to the site.

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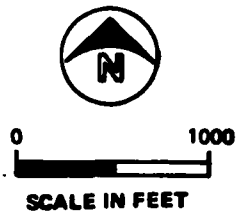
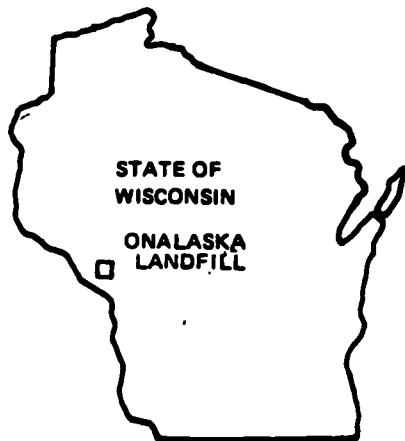
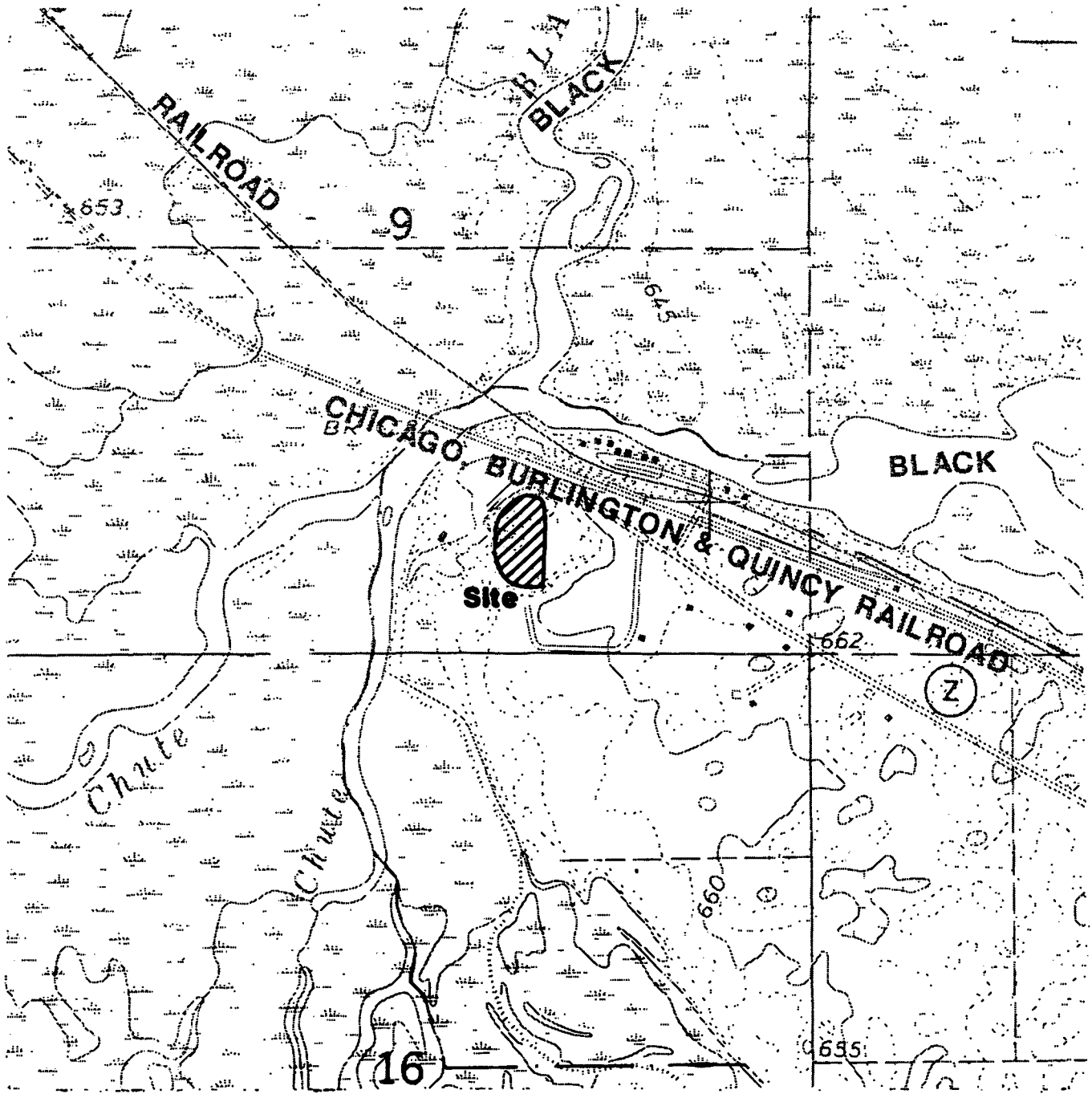
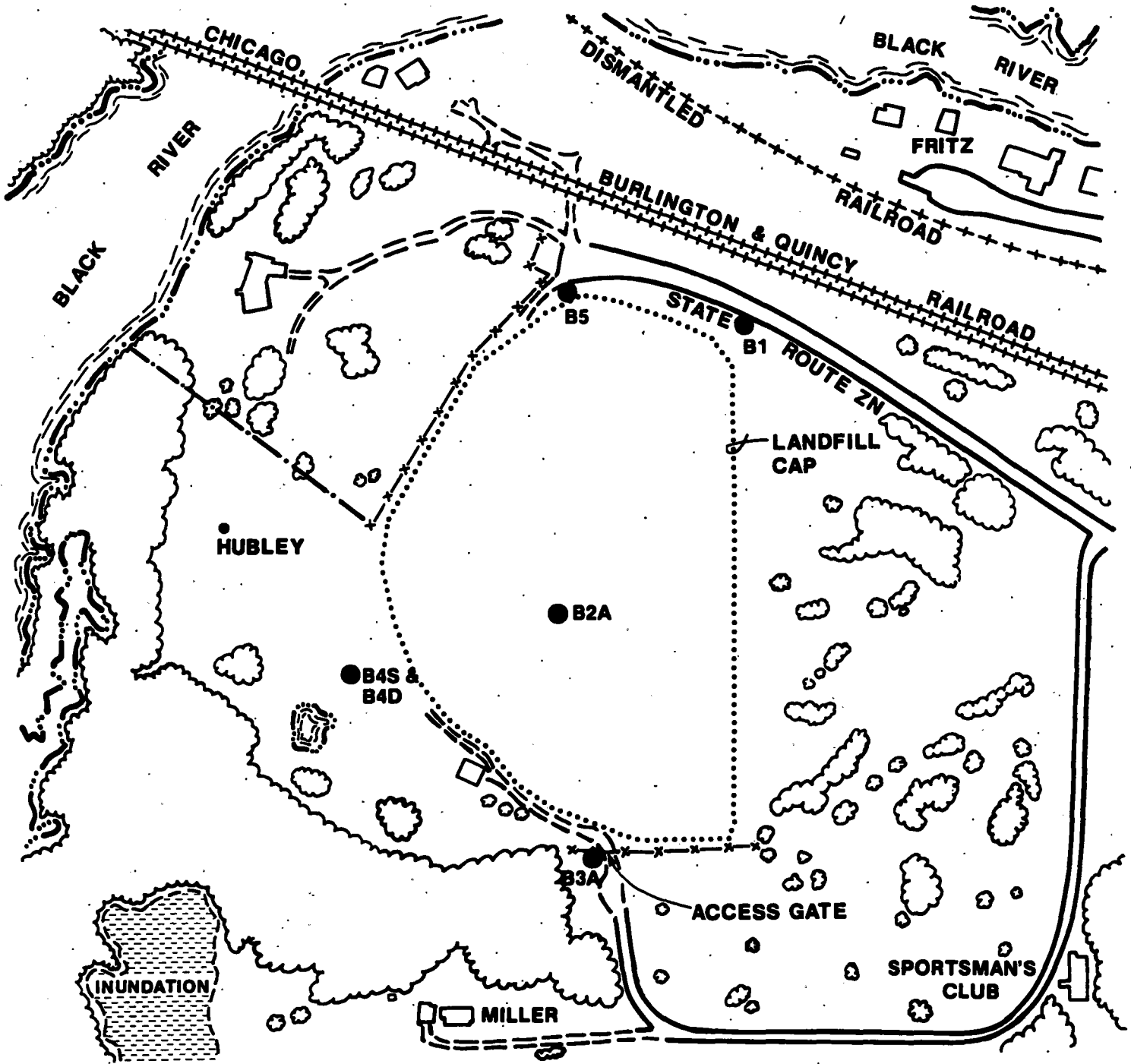


FIGURE 1
SITE LOCATION MAP
ONALASKA LANDFILL



LEGEND

● B5 MONITORING WELL LOCATION



0 200
SCALE IN FEET

FIGURE 2
SITE MAP
ONALASKA LANDFILL

Section 3
SITE HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

The Onalaska Landfill, also known as "Lytles Dump" and "Brice Prairie," is owned by the Town of Onalaska and was licensed to operate from 1969 until 1980, when it was ordered closed by the WDNR. A permit issued by the town board allowed the disposal of waste from residential, commercial, and industrial generators within the township. The landfill also accepted refuse from the Towns of Campbell and Medary and the City of Onalaska. Industrial wastes, which included compounds such as naphtha, toluene, waste oils, and paint residues were received from several businesses in the area.

Landfill operations were informal, and no attendant was present during the first 3 years. Open burning occurred at the site until 1971, when it was prohibited by the WDNR. In 1971, a lockable gate and fence partially surrounding the site were installed, operating hours were posted, and an attendant was present to cover waste and measure it for billing purposes. When an attendant was not present, keys were provided to users who received permission to use the landfill during times other than the posted hours. The WDNR also required an area to be designated specifically for the disposal of industrial solvents. Additionally, this area was to be immediately covered after each disposal. The township was cited on at least two occasions for noncompliance because of the lack of surface water drainage control, site location over permeable soils, and operating without proper engineering plans and specifications (Consent Order: Findings of Fact, February 9, 1978).

Because the landfill was not in compliance with the solid waste regulations, an order was issued by the WDNR to submit

an infield conditions report. In June of 1978, the WDNR reviewed the hydrogeology of the site and reported that during periods of seasonal high groundwater levels, the water table intersected the fill and was in direct contact with the waste.

The WDNR ordered the landfill closed by September 30, 1980, and in July 1982, the final cap was in place. Groundwater monitoring wells were installed and sampled in September 1982. Periodic groundwater sampling still continues. Some of the contaminants detected in groundwater samples collected from monitoring wells at the site included the volatile organic compounds (VOCs) 1,1-dichloroethene, 1,1-dichloroethane, trichloroethene, 1,1,1-trichloroethane, 1,1,2,2-tetrachloroethane, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene, and barium. The highest concentrations of total VOCs were detected in monitoring wells in the southwest corner of the site.

The compounds 1,1-dichloroethene, 1,1,2,2-tetrachloroethane, and trichloroethane are potential carcinogens, and exposure to these compounds could occur through ingestion of groundwater. An increased cancer risk is associated with the levels of contaminants detected in samples from the monitoring wells in the southwest corner of the site. However, no one is currently ingesting this groundwater.

On May 2, 1983, an EPA Potential Hazardous Waste site inspection report was submitted. In September 1984, the Onalaska Landfill was placed on the National Priorities List (NPL).

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Section 4
COMMUNITY PROFILE

Onalaska Township occupies more than 37 square miles, with the City of Onalaska situated near its southwest corner. Selected demographic information is provided in Table 1 for both the City and the unincorporated portion of Onalaska Township. These data indicate that the City and Town are similar in terms of median income and population growth.

Currently, the City of Onalaska is estimated to have a population of about 11,000 people, or about 19 percent more than in 1980. Population forecasts suggest continued strong growth, with a projected City population of 16,000 by the year 2000. Based on past trends, the growth rate of the Town of Onalaska should be similar to that of the City.

Nearly 200 businesses are located within the City of Onalaska. The City includes an industrial park which houses a construction company and a printing company, the two major industries in the area. The remaining business concerns in the City are primarily related to the service industry.

Recreation and tourism are the other major industries in the area. Fishing, boating, hiking, bicycling, golfing, and skiing are the most popular sports in the area.

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Table 1
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
CITY OF ONALASKA AND ONALASKA TOWNSHIP

	<u>Onalaska City</u>	<u>Onalaska Township</u>
Total Population (1980)	9,249	5,386
Percent Change (1970 to 1980)	88.4	81.2
Land Area (sq mi 1980)	5.2	37.8
Median Household Income	\$19,046	\$20,092

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, 1983, County and
City Data Book

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Section 5
OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Onalaska Landfill is located in a rural area near the point where the Black River joins the Mississippi River. The area, which is called Brice Prairie, is not densely populated; approximately 50 homes lie within 1-1/2 miles of the site. Of those, ten are located within a quarter mile of the landfill.

Most residents obtain their water from wells in the sand and gravel aquifer. Although studies have identified groundwater contamination beneath and to the south of the landfill, the wells of residents living near the site have shown no indication of contamination with the exception of one well immediately south of the site. Preliminary information compiled about site contamination indicates that it is unlikely that any other wells will become contaminated in the future.

During the 10 years the site was operating, community involvement included complaints to authorities, including the WDNR, about site conditions. Reports of foul odors and heavy smoke from the open burning of naphtha, an industrial solvent, resulted in the prohibition of all open burning, except for clean wood in a restricted area of the landfill. However, open burning continued to occur periodically.

One resident who lived next to the landfill filed a lawsuit claiming his well had been contaminated by hazardous wastes from the landfill. The suit was settled out of court in late 1982, and a new, deeper well was drilled on the property

early the following year. This new well has remained free of contamination according to the results of groundwater monitoring studies.

Complaints about conditions at the landfill have ceased since the site was fenced and covered with a 2-foot clay cap in 1982. In an effort to beautify the site, the Brice Prairie Conservation Association planted trees there. The group has discussed the possibility of using the site for recreational purposes in the future, but only as an option to consider if landfill contents are removed.

KEY COMMUNITY GROUPS AND INTERESTED PARTIES

Residents of the Town of Onalaska are well informed about issues and events of importance to their community, and they maintain an ongoing interest in remedial activities at the site. Other individuals and groups that have expressed interest in the landfill include township, county, state, and federal public officials, and members of the Brice Prairie Conservation Association.

See Appendix A for a list of key community contacts.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS AND INFORMATION NEEDS

The effort to manage hazardous waste at the landfill has not become a controversial or divisive issue in the community. However, during interviews for this plan, residents, civic leaders, and public officials expressed concern about the economic impact on the community of site remediation and possible negative consequences of onsite remedial activity.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

As the former owner and operator of the landfill, the Town of Onalaska is potentially liable for a portion of the cost of remedying contamination at the site. The amount of money the Town may be asked to pay is, by far, the community's major concern.

During interviews, local officials stressed that the township cannot afford a large cleanup bill. They are eager to see the project completed satisfactorily, but they want costs kept as low as possible. Some area residents are apprehensive that a tax increase could be required to fund remedial action at the site.

In a related concern, officials of the town want assurance that documentation about the landfill's disposal history is thoroughly researched and maintained to ensure that cleanup costs are apportioned appropriately among the PRPs.

ONSITE ACTIVITY

The community's other primary concern involves onsite testing and other construction work. Some residents worry that groundwater monitoring or other activities conducted during the remedial investigation could disturb the clay cap that covers the site, releasing contaminants into the environment. A similar concern exists if the remedy eventually selected for the site would involve removing the clay cap and the contents of the landfill.

Maintaining the site's appearance also is important to community members. The site is attractive and does not look like it was once used as a waste disposal facility. Planted with grass and neatly fenced, the site may easily be mistaken for

an open field or farm land. Some residents are concerned that grass will not be replanted, roads and other damage will not be repaired, and equipment and refuse will not be removed from the site when remedial activities are finished.

OTHER CONCERNS

To a lesser degree, concern exists about the possible effect of the landfill on public health and the environment.

Although contamination has not been found in wells near the site, some residents have expressed concern that their wells might be affected in the future if no remedial action is taken at the site.

The Town of Onalaska is located in an area known for its natural beauty, and preserving the environment is important to members of the community. The landfill is near the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge, a wetland that is home to a variety of species of fish, migratory birds, and other wildlife. During most of the year, groundwater discharges under the site to the refuge, which borders the Black River. Some of the people interviewed questioned whether contamination from the site could eventually reach the refuge in concentrations great enough to harm fish and wildlife.

Community members want to be kept informed about site activities and involved in the decisionmaking process. Community members said they want information about:

- o Groundwater contamination and groundwater resources in general
- o Hazards associated with the wastes disposed of at the landfill, especially solvents

- o Technologies available to remedy site contamination
- o Public meetings and other opportunities to obtain information and offer input about site activities
- o The Superfund program

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Section 6
COMMUNITY RELATIONS PROGRAM

During remedial activities at the Onalaska Landfill, the EPA will conduct a Community Relations Program that addresses community issues and fosters two-way communication between the Agency and those interested in the Onalaska Landfill site.

COMMUNITY RELATIONS OBJECTIVES

The Superfund program emphasizes the importance of community involvement. The objectives of the EPA's Community Relations Program are to:

- o Maintain open communication among the EPA, WDNR, those who live near the site, township, county, state and federal officials, and other interested individuals or groups
- o Cooperate with effective, existing communication networks, such as civic organizations, to ensure that the community's information needs are met
- o Provide residents, agencies, local officials, civic leaders, and media with accurate, timely information about progress of remedial activities, the Superfund process and other crucial technical and administrative matters
- o Ensure that the Agency continues to effectively communicate with the community about issues involving the Onalaska site by being aware of changes in community concerns as remedial activities progress and revising the Community Relations Plan in light of these changes

COMMUNITY RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

The following community relations activities are suggested for the Onalaska site.

EPA PRESENCE AND CONTACTS

During the remedial investigation and feasibility study, the EPA will maintain ongoing contact with members of the community, either by phone or in person. When appropriate, briefings may be held for elected officials and other community and civic leaders to keep them apprised of activity at the site. During interviews, Town officials noted that U.S. EPA staff contacts seem to have changed frequently, making it difficult to know whom to contact.

NEWS RELEASES

New releases will be issued to local media to provide important information about site-related activities. Releases will be prepared to coincide with technical milestones and during the course of the work as needed. Copies will also be sent to other interested parties on the mailing list. If necessary, local officials will be contacted prior to release of important information to the media.

FACT SHEETS

Fact sheets will be prepared to coincide with important technical milestones, public comment periods, and as needed. The first fact sheet will describe how the Superfund process works and tell those who live near the site what to expect during the remedial investigation, such as when workers will be onsite and the types of protective clothing they may wear.

Fact sheets will contain clear, accurate descriptions of technical information prepared in a style and format that will encourage use and understanding.

Fact sheets will be filed at the information repositories, distributed to persons on the mailing list, and made available at public meetings or other gatherings. The first fact sheet will include a glossary of technical terms and agency officials to contact if the reader needs more information. Interested parties will be encouraged to add their names to the mailing list through use of coupons or other mechanisms.

INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

The information repositories, which are listed in the Appendix, will be updated as necessary with the most current information about site activities.

PUBLIC MEETINGS AND AVAILABILITY SESSIONS

Public meetings and informal availability sessions are effective ways to give the general public an opportunity to receive information and provide the Agency with feedback regarding site activities. Meetings or sessions will be planned to coincide with program milestones. Meetings or sessions will be announced in news releases and in fact sheets which will be distributed prior to the meetings or sessions. They will be held at a convenient location in the community, such as Holmen High School or the Town Hall.

Community relations activities are timed to coincide with technical milestones in the Superfund process or on an as-needed basis. See Appendix C for a schedule of community relations activities.

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Appendix A
CONTACT/MAILING LIST

Onalaska Residents, Township, and County Officials

Clarence Hammess
La Crosse County Board
2640 Bayshore Drive
La Crosse, WI 54601

George Hammess
Chairman
La Crosse County Board
W8213 Sternford
Holmen, WI 54636

Mr. and Mrs. Ray Hubley*
W8672 County Road Z
Onalaska, WI 54650

Linda Carlson
Clerk, Town of Onalaska
Onalaska Town Hall
W7052 Second Street
Onalaska, WI 54650

Leith Marking*
W7917 North Shore Drive
Onalaska, WI 54650

Merle Paudler*
Town Foreman
N5781 CHOT
Onalaska, WI 54650

Carl Pedretti*
Chairman, Town Board
6796 Keppel Road
Holmen, WI 54636

State and Federal Officials

Senator Robert Kasten
517 E. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Senator William Proxmire
517 E. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Congressman Steve Gunderson
438 North Water Street
Black River Falls, WI 54615

State Rep. Virgil Roberts
P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

State Sen. Brian D. Rude
319 South, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53702

U.S. EPA

Kevin Adler* 5HS-11
Remedial Project Manager
U.S. EPA
230 South Dearborn
Chicago, IL 60604

Susan Pastor* 5PA-14
Community Relations
Coordinator
U.S. EPA
230 South Dearborn
Chicago, IL 60604

U.S. EPA Contractor

Phil Smith*
Site Manager
CH2M HILL

*Interviewed in person or by telephone
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U.S. EPA Contractor

Phil Smith*
Site Manager
CH2M HILL

*Interviewed in person or by telephone

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Robin Schmidt*
Wisconsin Department of
Natural Resources
Bureau of Waste Mgmt.
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707

Mark Williams*
Wisconsin Department of
Natural Resources
Bureau of Waste Mgmt.
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707

Media

La Crosse Tribune
401 North Third Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

WKBT-TV
P.O. Box 1867
La Crosse, WI 54602

WRM Radio
P.O. Box 99
La Crosse, WI 54601

WLAX-TV
1305 Interchange Place
La Crosse, WI 54603

WKTY/WSPL Radio
704 La Crosse Street
La Crosse, WI 54601

WXOW-TV
P.O. Box C-4019
La Crosse, WI 54602

WLXR Radio
P.O. Box 2017
La Crosse, WI 54602

Don Behm
Milwaukee Journal
P.O. Box 661
Milwaukee, WI 53201

WLSU Radio
1725 State Street
University of Wisconsin
La Crosse, WI 54601

PRP Representatives

Kristine Euclid
Stafford Law Firm
P.O. Box 784
Madison, WI 53701-1784

Sylvia Allen
Omark Industries
P.O. Box 39
Onalaska, WI 54650

*Interviewed in person or by telephone

Appendix B
INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

La Crosse County Library,
Onalaska Branch
230 Main Street
Onalaska, WI. 54650

Holmen Public Library
103 State Street
Holmen, WI 54636

Appendix C
SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Timing</u>
EPA Presence & Contacts	Ongoing
News Releases	Technical Milestones, As Needed
Fact Sheets	Technical Milestones, Public Comment Periods, As Needed
Information Repositories	Ongoing
Public Meetings	As Needed
Availability Sessions	As Needed