

# Tips for Communicating Assessment Findings

Public health assessments are developed by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to identify and prevent health issues that may result from exposure to harmful contamination in the environment. This tip sheet provides best practices for conveying public health assessment findings to community members who may have mixed levels of understanding and awareness about the hazards and risks that were found in their community. These tips are intended to help address and reduce concerns, manage expectations, and effectively communicate risk/hazards among community members.

## Tips for Holding Successful Public Meetings To Communicate Findings

- **Reintroduce ATSDR and reiterate expectations** to provide community members with some background and context for assessment findings. Remember that the initial meeting you held with the community may have been a while ago and there may be people at this meeting who were not at the first meeting or don't recall ATSDR's role.

Important points to cover could include:

- Brief description of who ATSDR is.
- Explanation of ATSDR's role and a description of the expected outcomes of the health assessment process. (This can be framed in contrast to what other agencies such as EPA would do.)
- Explanation about why ATSDR is holding today's meeting and what people can expect to learn at today's meeting.

The ATSDR video, *The Health Assessment Process and Your Community*, is also useful for expectation setting. You may want to consider showing it again as a refresher, even if you showed it at your initial community meeting.

- **Have information ready to address basic questions about risk based on the assessment findings and how community members can protect themselves, if needed.**

These questions may include the following:

- What was found?
  - What do the findings mean to the health of individuals in the community? Are there individuals who are at increased risk of health problems due to exposure based on age, sex, disabilities, or other health conditions?
  - How do people know that they were exposed?
  - What should people do if they believe they have been exposed?
  - What will be done as a result of the assessment, when, and by whom?
- **Express an appropriate level of concern.** This should be based on the level of risk that was found from the site assessment, but will also need to reflect the perceived level of risk and the level of concern of community members. See the Community Meeting Guidelines handout for more on how the level of community concern can affect communication.

- **Be sure to listen.** Listen to what is being asked by community members and answer their questions. When community members feel that ATSDR is actively listening and responding to their questions, it contributes to trust on the part of community members and helps maintain ATSDR's credibility. Remember you are there to receive information as well as disseminate it.
- **Fact sheets or other handouts and materials used to reinforce messages conveyed at the meeting should be reviewed for plain language ahead of time.** Plainly worded materials will help ensure that the information you are conveying to the community is clearly communicated and understood by your audience.
- **Consider translating or adapting English language materials for diverse audiences and determine whether you need a translator at the meeting.** Depending on the community you are serving, you may need to translate or adapt materials so that your messages will be culturally and linguistically appropriate, relevant, and understood. You may also want to have a translator at the meeting. These decisions should be based on community demographics and discussions with key community leaders. Community partners may also be able to help facilitate or assist in the translation/adaptation process and/or provide a translator.

## More About Using Fact Sheets


General fact sheets can be used to assist you in reintroducing ATSDR to the community, the media, and other stakeholders. You can distribute the fact sheets as is, or distribute them along with site-specific fact sheets as needed. You should only distribute fact sheets pertinent to the health concerns of a specific site.

The Guide to Materials Development handout in this toolkit provides more details on how to develop materials, cleared materials that may be useful, and templates.

## Resources

ATSDR's "Community Matters" Web page (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/com/commhome.html>) contains links to fact sheets on ATSDR, its programs, and its work with communities, as well as information about ATSDR activities that may be occurring in the site community. For example:


- **About ATSDR**—provides general information about ATSDR and an overview of some of its programs and its work with communities, tribes, and local, State, and Federal agencies. (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/about/index.html>)
- **What You Can Expect From ATSDR**—explains ATSDR's mission and describes what ATSDR can and cannot do given its legal authority. (<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/COM/whatyou.html>).
- **Public Health Assessments**—describes what this type of evaluation considers, the types of information it evaluates, and how the evaluation is used. It also includes information about how the community can get involved in the process. <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hac/products/pha.html>
- **Public Health Consultations**—describes what this type of evaluation considers, the types of information that it evaluates, and how the evaluation's recommendations are used. <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hac/products/consultation.html>
- **Exposure Investigations**—describes how an exposure investigation is one approach ATSDR uses to develop better characterizations of past, current, and possible future human exposures to hazardous substances in the environment. ATSDR also uses exposure investigations to evaluate more thoroughly current and potential health effects



related to those exposures.

<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hac/products/ei.html>

- **Public Health Advisories**—describes how ATSDR evaluates and responds to a hazardous substance release into the environment that poses an immediate and significant danger to people’s health.  
<http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/hac/products/advisory.html>

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- **Fact Sheet Template (on CDC's intranet):**  
[http://brandidentitystandards.cdc.gov/Center\\_and\\_Program\\_Brand\\_Identity\\_Standards/ATSDR/ATSDR\\_Fact\\_Sheet\\_Templates](http://brandidentitystandards.cdc.gov/Center_and_Program_Brand_Identity_Standards/ATSDR/ATSDR_Fact_Sheet_Templates)
  - **PowerPoint Template (on CDC's intranet):**  
[http://brandidentitystandards.cdc.gov/Center\\_and\\_Program\\_Brand\\_Identity\\_Standards/ATSDR/ATSDR\\_PowerPoint\\_Templates](http://brandidentitystandards.cdc.gov/Center_and_Program_Brand_Identity_Standards/ATSDR/ATSDR_PowerPoint_Templates)

ATSDR also has a set of cleared messages that you can use to help you clarify ATSDR's role in the community, set expectations, and effectively communicate risk.