

OBSERVATION DECKS

An observation deck is an elevated deck on the facility property near the area where corrective action or RCRA-regulated activities are in progress. The deck allows interested community members to directly observe facility activities.

Required activity?

No.

Making it Work

Maintaining an observation deck can be time-intensive depending on how much time staff members need to supervise the deck. Consider hiring a contractor to staff the deck or limiting hours when the deck is open. In addition, constructing, staffing, and maintaining an observation deck may be costly, so consider costs before agreeing to create an observation deck. If it is not feasible to construct an observation deck, consider posting photos or videos of facility activities to a publicly accessible website or working with the facility owner to coordinate site visits.

More detailed information on observation decks and other public participation activities for use at various stages of the RCRA process can be found in Chapter 5 of the [2016 Edition of the RCRA Public Participation Manual](#).

When to Use

An observation deck can be useful when:

- the level of community interest in the facility is high;
- staff members or contractors are available to supervise public use of the deck and answer questions;
- it is physically possible to construct a deck in a safe and suitable location; and
- there are significant opportunities to educate the public using the deck (for example, if a corrective action is being implemented, or when a new technology is being tested or implemented).

How to Use

The agency and facility owner/operator should work together to do the following:

- **Determine need for deck:** Decide whether or not an observation deck is needed or desirable, based on community interest and suitability of the site. Alternatively, virtual tours (e.g., graphics and videos of the facility) could be made available online if an observation deck is not feasible.
- **Locate a deck construction site:** Determine the best location for the observation deck, keeping in mind safety and public access issues.
- **Identify staffing needs:** Determine the hours of operation for the observation deck. Identify staff to supervise the observation deck, and prepare staff to answer questions from the public.
- **Provide additional information:** An observation deck could complement facility tours or an on-scene information office. Fact sheets or an informative exhibit placed near the deck also could further aid in explaining facility activities.
- **Notify the public:** Notify the community that the deck is available through public notices, fact sheets, a mailing to the facility mailing list, and online postings.

Tips

- Consider construction, staff, and maintenance costs before agreeing to create an observation deck.
- Supplement observation decks with fact sheets or an informative exhibit so that community members understand what they see.
- Ensure that the health and safety of visitors are protected.
- If staffing is an issue, hire a contractor to staff the deck or limit hours when the deck is open.
- If it is not feasible to construct an observation deck, post photos or videos of facility activities to a publicly accessible website.

Checklist for Observation Decks

- Coordinate with the facility to determine need for and suitability of an observation deck.
- Identify staff available to supervise the deck and answer questions from interested community members.
- Coordinate deck construction.
- Set hours of operation for the observation deck.
- Notify interested community members of the availability of the observation deck with:
 - **Public notices.**
 - **Fact sheets.**
 - **Mailings** to facility mailing lists.
 - Postings to relevant websites or **social media** accounts.
- Maintain observation deck.
- Consider posting virtual tours online as a supplement or if an observation deck is not feasible.