

## ON-SCENE INFORMATION OFFICES

An on-scene information office is a trailer, small building, or office space on or near the facility site, depending on what is more convenient and accessible for the affected community. This office should always be staffed by a member(s) of the federal or state agency reviewing the permit application, or a contractor selected by the agency. The staff member or contractor should be capable of responding to inquiries and preparing information releases that the agency can issue after review.

On-scene information offices can be effective in ensuring that other stakeholders are adequately informed about permitting activities, and that their concerns are addressed as quickly as possible. However, they are a time-intensive activity, and may require keeping staff in the office up to 40 hours a week. Therefore, these offices should be used only when community concerns are currently high or may be high in the future. In addition, consider hiring a contractor to staff the office and inform the community about when the office will be open. It is best that a representative is there for some specified period during the week.

### Required activity?

No.

EPA's public participation guidelines for on-scene information offices are detailed in Chapter 5 of the [2016 Edition of the RCRA Public Participation Manual](#).

### Making it Work

First, the permitting agency should establish an office. Rent a trailer and arrange with the facility owner to designate space, or rent office space in the local community. If establishing the office off-site, find an area near the facility or in the nearest town. Install a telephone with voicemail to respond to inquiries. Publicize the number in local newspapers, on community websites, and in public participation publications. Provide a computer with internet access so staffers can respond to online requests.

Assign someone to staff the office, and establish regular hours, including some during the weekend and weekday evenings. Publicize the information office's hours and services. Equip the office with the same materials normally contained in an information repository, if possible. At a minimum, include key documents and summaries of additional documents. Provide a copy machine so that the public can make copies of documents provided.

### When to Use

An on-scene information office may be used:

- When community interest or concern is high;
- During corrective actions;
- When cleanup involves complex technologies or processes;
- When the community perceives a high level of risk to health;
- When activities may disrupt the area surrounding the facility (e.g., traffic patterns); or
- When the area near the facility is densely populated.

### How to Use

The on-scene staff person can conduct meetings and question and answer sessions to inform community members about the status of the corrective actions or other facility operations. Staff also may prepare and distribute fact sheets and newsletters to local community members, conduct facility tours, and support the telephone hotline (if one is set up). An on-scene information office also may be a good location for the **Information Repository**.

Individuals staffing an on-scene information office for an extended period of time will necessarily have a special role in the community. Involvement in public participation activities will be a large part of their function. On-site staff also may be responsible for maintaining databases of community members' addresses, the status of access to property, and a daily log of inquiries. On-site staff should monitor public perceptions and concerns daily using a telephone hotline or a web-based forum. These staff can often make useful recommendations regarding stakeholder concerns. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, on-site staff frequently serve as a liaison with the public.

## Checklist for On-Scene Information Offices

- Determine need for an on-scene information office.
- Identify staff to work in the office.
- Rent a trailer or office space for the information office.
- Equip the office with a telephone, internet access, office equipment (i.e., copier, computer), and all materials contained in an information repository.
- Notify interested people of availability of an on-scene information office via a public notice, fact sheet, mailing to the facility mailing list, or update on the project website or social media, as applicable.
- Maintain on-scene information office. Have staff:
  - Maintain the mailing list.
  - Assist permitting agency with media coverage as part of the information process for stakeholders.
  - Respond to calls and online questions from community members and stakeholder groups.
  - Refer visitors to additional materials available on-line and in the information repository.