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Question and Answer Sessions

Question and answer sessions provide a means for direct communication between the organization and community members, and are effective at providing one-on-one explanations in an informal setting. Question and answer (Q&A) sessions give stakeholders an opportunity to discuss RCRA actions with knowledgeable staff.

Required activity?

No.

EPA's public participation guidelines for the use of Q&A sessions at various stages of the RCRA process can be found in Chapter 5 of the 2016 Edition of the RCRA Public Participation Manual.

Making it Work

When to Use

Question and answer sessions are appropriate when the public needs more information or the presenting organization needs more feedback. Question and answer sessions can be used following exhibits, presentations, briefings, meetings, facility tours, and other activities.

How to Use

When conducting a question and answer session after an event, consider the following:

- Announcement. Announce that someone will be available for questions after the event.
- Tone and responsiveness. Be responsive, direct, and clear. Ensure that all questions are answered. If staff cannot answer the question on the spot, they should not be afraid to say, "I don't know" and offer to answer the question after getting more information. A staff member should write down the question, discuss it with other staff members, and respond as soon as possible by phone, letter, or email. Try to avoid using jargon that the public will not understand.
- Brainstorming. Consider brainstorming ahead of time to develop potential questions and to prepare responses.
- Prepare for follow-up. Prepare a methodology for responding to questions that were unable to be answered during the session.

Checklist for Question and Answer Sessions

- ❒ If the Q&A session is scheduled to be after a meeting or other event, inform people where it will be held during the meeting.
- ❒ Brainstorm potential questions and prepare responses.
- ❒ Remind speakers to be frank and avoid jargon in their answers.
- ❒ If speakers cannot answer a question during the session, take the questioner's contact information and respond to the question as soon as possible via phone, letter, or email.
- ❒ Consider posting answers on the regulatory agency's website and compiling a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).