

## UNSOLICITED INFORMATION AND OFFICE VISITS

Community members or stakeholders from other groups may want to visit the EPA office or the facility in person or virtually via an online forum. In either situation, the visiting or online stakeholders will want to engage with the expert who can most directly address their concerns. At other times, the site team may receive unsolicited information through phone calls, letters, emails, social media posts, and meetings. Unsolicited information can be very helpful. It can provide an idea of the level of public concern over a facility, and community members often provide information that is essential to making sound technical, economic, and policy decisions. Local community members often have valuable knowledge and insight about the conditions of the land and the people surrounding a facility.

EPA encourages permitting agencies, public interest groups, and facility owners/operators to seek input from interested community members and other stakeholders in informal settings such as this. While this type of information is not always asked for, it can be helpful.

### Required activity?

No.

More detailed information on optional 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](#).

### Making It Work

Members of the public will come to the permitting agency, the facility, or another organization with information and requests. Public affairs personnel should be available for discussion and information when visitors come. If interested people come to the office, they should be received by a staff member who can relate well with the public and knows the overall mission of the organization. If feasible, the staff member should introduce the visitors to members of the staff who can discuss specific issues. Staff should listen to the community members' concerns and provide feedback where possible. They should be candid when they do not know the answer to a question. They should also be cordial, avoid jargon and overly technical language, and try to address the visitor's problem. If community members send a letter or make a phone call, respond as soon as possible. If the response will be delayed, a representative of the organization should write a letter or call to explain. Consider all relevant comments as informal input into the permitting process, and let community members know how they can submit formal comments.

Unsolicited information is a constant in community participation. Organizations can improve (or maintain) the credibility of their organization by giving due weight to community members' concerns and by replying promptly to community member input.

Fact sheets, project reports, and other mailings or online postings can answer questions or reply to community member inquiries. Offer to put concerned community members on the mailing list. Consider holding an availability session, open house, or informal meetings if a high level of public interest is detected.

Unsolicited information can highlight issues of high public concern and allow identification of involved groups in the community. Visitors to an organization can get to know the staff, while the staff gains a better understanding of the visitors' concerns. Being attentive and receptive to unsolicited information can help create a good outreach program,

which can increase an organization's credibility.

Unsolicited information should be seen only as a supplement to more formal information-gathering. It may not reflect the overall level of public concern. Good communication and cooperation within an organization are required to handle unsolicited information.

## Checklist for Unsolicited Information and Office Visits

- For office visits:
  - Appoint a staff member to act as a liaison for public visits.
  - The liaison should answer questions and introduce stakeholders to members of the organization who are involved in the issue.
  - Invite visitors to put their names on the mailing list.
  - Follow up quickly on any questions that could not be answered during the visit.
- For phone calls, written requests, and emails:
  - Keep a log of calls, letters, and emails from other stakeholders.
  - Respond quickly to questions; inform the questioner if your response will not be timely.
- For online forums:
  - Respond quickly to comments; inform the commenter if your response will not be timely.