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prc **Planning Research Corporation**

January 17, 1991

Mr. Vern McFarland
Community Relations Coordinator
U.S. EPA Region 6
1445 Ross Avenue (6H-MC)
Dallas, TX 75202

Re: EPA Contract No. 68-W9-0006
Work Assignment No. C06009
Arkwood, Inc., Site--Community Interviews

Dear Mr. McFarland:

PRC Environmental Management, Inc., (PRC) personnel visited Omaha, Arkansas, on October 30 and 31, and November 7, 8, 9, and 12, 1990, to interview Omaha community members about the selected remedy for the Arkwood Superfund site. The interviews targeted approximately 102 of the 189 individuals who had signed a petition against the selected remedy. Some of the 189 signatures were duplicates and others were children's. The individuals interviewed included Omaha citizens, school board members, school teachers, the water superintendent, city aldermen, and the mayor.

The purpose of the interviews was to discover and address community questions and concerns about the selected remedy for remediating the site. The information obtained during each interview was recorded on a Citizen's Inquiry Form. The complete set of Citizen's Inquiry Forms is included as Attachment A.

The interview results showed that although a petition against the selected remedy was signed by members of the community, the majority of those who signed the petition did so for one of two reasons: (1) others had signed the petition or (2) they did not understand the selected remedy.

Of the remaining people opposed to the selected remedy, most had objections related to one or more of the following issues:

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- Safety of incineration
- Concern that a hazard may not exist
- EPA credibility
- Cleanup costs

Also, the degree of opposition varied from those who were mildly opposed to those who were strongly opposed. Those with strong opposition were concerned mainly because of the incinerator's proximity to the school. This group of people included local officials, school administrators and teachers, and parents of students. Several of the teachers and the mayor's wife wanted to know why EPA was proceeding with the selected remedy when the school board, city council, and county commissioners had voted against it. Many have written to their congressmen and senators. These and other issues are discussed below.

Safety of Incineration

In general, interviewees in this category were concerned about the incineration process and the possibility that contaminants could be emitted from the incinerator. The main reason for this concern appeared to be the proposed incinerator's proximity to the local school and its possible effects on the teachers and students. One interviewee, Dr. David Land, Omaha School Superintendent, expressed concern about teachers threatening to leave the school, parents withholding their children, and the school subsequently shutting down if an incinerator is used at the site.

Seven interviewees were concerned about possible malfunctions of the proposed incinerator. These people were also concerned about the effectiveness of incinerators in general. Five interviewees opposed to the selected remedy were under the impression that the incinerator would be permanent; they believed that this would cause further contamination problems.

Concern That a Hazard May Not Exist

In general, the interviewees in this category either doubted that the site poses a real health hazard or thought that the existing hazard was not severe enough to warrant using an incinerator at the site. Five interviewees felt that if the site "posed such a hazard," EPA should have taken

action to clean up the site years ago. They wondered why nothing had been done over the past 8 or so years to clean up the site.

Eighteen citizens and one local official felt that the site should be either fenced, covered, or left alone. Some people felt that cleanup is not necessary because waste is no longer being generated at the site. Because the existing waste is underground, they felt that it would not harm anyone.

EPA Credibility

One interviewee believed that EPA would proceed with the selected remedy despite the fact that some people in the community oppose incineration. Others stated that they either did not trust EPA or felt that EPA needs to build credibility in the community. Several of these citizens felt that EPA failed to give "clear, straightforward" answers to questions at public meetings.

Cleanup Costs

Sixteen interviewees were opposed to the selected remedy because they believed it was too expensive and a waste of money. A few citizens were concerned about the amount of money Mass Merchandisers would have to pay for the cleanup and the possible bankruptcy of the company as a result. One local official expressed concern about money being taken out of the community as a result of Mass Merchandisers paying for the cleanup. Two citizens believed that instead of paying for the selected remedy, Mass Merchandisers should distribute money to its employees.

Miscellaneous Issues

Several interviewees were opposed to the selected remedy for various other reasons. Some people felt that the site should be cleaned up but not by incineration. No methods were suggested. Others expressed fears of wastes being brought from other sites to the Arkwood incinerator. Still others thought that EPA should not be concerned with surface soils, but should be looking for underground pockets of waste because the selected remedy would not remove such

waste. In addition, a few citizens did not understand incineration and felt that EPA should hold a public meeting to explain the concept to the community in "simple terms." Finally, two citizens opposed to the remedy said that they did not have an opinion on incineration.

Summary

Based on the information obtained during the interviews, most community concerns stem from lack of knowledge about the selected remedy and the incineration process. Several interviewees mentioned that the only reason they signed the petition against the selected remedy was that "everyone else signed it." Taking this into consideration, PRC recommends that EPA hold a public meeting in Omaha, Arkansas, to explain the selected remedy and the incineration process and to assure members of the community that the incinerator would not be permanent.

If you have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at 312/856-8700 or Tony Gardner at 214/754-8765.

Sincerely,

Carol Edwards

Carol P. Edwards
Community Relations Coordinator

Attachment

cc: Tony Gardner, PRC
Joi Ross, PRC

xc: Betty Williamson
Gary Bonoy
Brent Truskowski ✓