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From Crisis to Collaboration - Building Stakeholder & Regulatory Partnerships Through Openness & Engagement

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Track 4-7

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From Crisis to Collaboration

This is a story about how one lab rebuilt trust with the local and regional community and key stakeholders through transparency, openness, and engagement...



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Brookhaven Lab at a Glance...

- Est. 1947
- One of 17 DOE Labs and 6 DOE Office of Science, multi-program Labs
 - Only one in Northeast
- Managed by Brookhaven Science Associates (BSA) founded by Stony Brook University and Battelle Memorial Institute under contract with the U.S. DOE
 - Core universities: Harvard, Princeton, Yale, MIT, Columbia, Cornell
- BSA was selected to manage BNL in 1998 and successfully recompleted in 2014
- 2,600 employees => ~5000 jobs in NY State
 - 400 Grad/Undergrad Students (BNL payroll)
- \$580M annual budget
- 5,322 acres with 315 buildings
- Major user facility for university and industry researchers
 - Over 2,900 facility users and 2,300 visiting scientists per year
 - Stony Brook University is Lab's largest user (>600)
- Fundamental, basic research to innovation, development and commercialization of technologies: energy S&T, nuclear and high energy physics, bio and environmental sciences, big data, national security



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1997 - A Lab in Crisis



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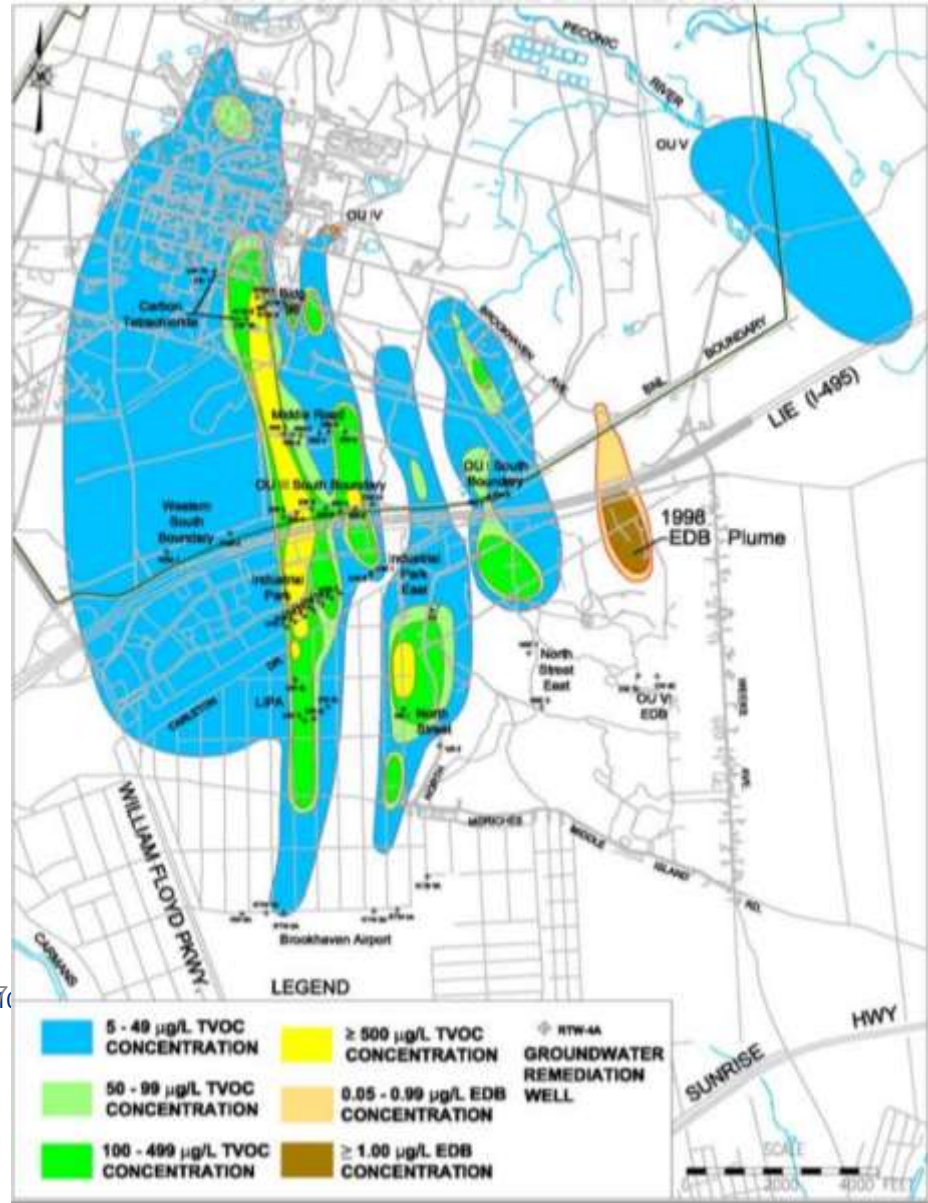
National Exposure...



Montel Williams Show – January 9, 1998

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Brookhaven Aerial and 1997 Plume Map



Background

- 1989 – Listed on Federal National Priorities (Superfund) List for known chemical/radiological soil and groundwater contamination
- 1992 – Federal Facilities Agreement (Tri-Party Agreement)
 - DOE, EPA, New York State Department of Conservation (NYSDEC) with Suffolk County Department of Health Services' (SCDHS) oversight provides framework for cleanup on-site under the Interagency Agreement (IAG)
- 1996 – Public Water Hookups
 - Most local homes used private wells for potable water
 - DOE funds connection of 1,400 local homes (south and east of the Lab site, in the direction of groundwater flow) to public water to address known chemical contamination
- 1997 – Tritium Leak from High Flux Beam Reactor spent fuel pool
 - Causes great public outcry, negative media attention
 - Associated Universities fired by Energy Sec. Pena after managing BNL for 50 years
 - Brookhaven Executive Roundtable was formed – a forum hosted by DOE for frequent, routine, and executive-level communications about BNL and cleanup efforts, and to integrate activities within the community related to BNL
- 1998 – Brookhaven Science Associates (Battelle and Stony Brook University) awarded M&O contract for BNL and immediately began working to rebuild trust with the community



Options: Site Specific Advisory Board or Citizen's Committee?

November 1997: A Site Specific Advisory Board (SSAB) Workshop was hosted by DOE at BNL

- SSABs governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA)
- Open forum with 22 attending
- SSAB members from six DOE facilities discussed their experiences and answered questions
- Attendees' survey result: Both for and against establishing an SSAB
- SSAB Workshop input insufficient for DOE action

January-March 1998: Exploration Committee was formed and charged to “explore and discuss the broad community's views about whether or not to establish an SSAB at BNL”

- Committee surveyed 1,500 local/regional organizations
 - Clear willingness to participate, commit time/energy
 - Recommends formation of a “citizen committee”
- BNL chose to form a “citizen committee” to advise the Laboratory director
 - Based on community's stated desire to start ASAP — SSAB would have taken months or years for required approvals and would have been limited to environmental issues only

Our Strategy to Restore Trust

BSA management developed a multi-faceted strategy to restore trust:

- We put a commitments and correspondence tracking system in place to ensure all community inquiries were logged, assigned to a senior manager and addressed in seven days
- We developed a Community Involvement Management System to capture stakeholder comments, inquiries and feedback
- We made sure that all relevant cleanup reports, correspondence, fact sheets and data of interest to the community were posted on the website
- BSA management made a commitment to changing the culture of the Laboratory from one of *informing* to one of *involving* the community in issues of interest to them, and measuring the effectiveness of its communications programs
- We developed a “Community Involvement in Lab Decision-Making” handbook for Lab managers to help guide them when making decisions that could impact the community or environment

Most importantly...

- John (Jack) Marburger served as the President of Stony Brook University for 14 years before being named director of BNL in 1998
- He had built significant credibility with many of the Lab's critics while in that role, and was known as someone who brings people together
- Jack made a very firm commitment to organizational transparency
 - Communications were to be open, swift, and complete
 - There was to be full disclosure of the benefits and consequences of Lab activities in a manner that could be understood/used by the community
 - He made a personal commitment to listen to the diverse voices of the constituencies interested in the Lab



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A Community Advisory Council is Born

- May 1998: BNL John Marburger invited 30 organizations and individuals to join what would officially become the “BNL Community Advisory Council,” or CAC
- First meeting held in September 1998
- Membership includes representatives from environmental organizations, civic groups, the business community, local government, and Lab employees
- Group has met ~10 times a year since 1998 and provided input on more than two dozen key cleanup decisions
 - Peconic River cleanup alternatives
 - Graphite Reactor D&D funding
 - Off-site groundwater treatment options
 - Strontium-90 cleanup options



Working Together with the CAC

- Since its inception, the CAC has been provided with detailed information and timely updates on the Lab's cleanup program
- Presentations are given at each of its monthly meetings by subject matter experts, primarily within the Environmental Protection Division (EPD)
- Presentations are sent to the regulators for review prior to each CAC meeting to ensure the Lab's transparency on cleanup-related activities
- Regulators often seek CAC comment/input on cleanup options
- CAC asks questions, provides comments, and gives important feedback on all aspects and phases of the Lab's cleanup program
- CAC recommendations are seriously considered by the Lab director as well as the Environmental Protection Division and regulators



Partnering with the Regulators

- Utilized focus group strategy during CERCLA RI/FS process for significant decisions, helped to develop a team atmosphere
- Timely sharing of new and unexpected data, offer split sampling opportunities, provide data in requested electronic format, offer site visits during work activities
- Conduct routine IAG conference calls that have been scaled back from weekly to monthly as program matures. Agendas include current issues, work plans, data results, system modification request, etc.
- Provide a comprehensive annual groundwater report, focus on graphics to communicate information and progress, follow up with briefings to each agency (generates positive feedback from all agencies)
- Work together on our presentations to the CAC (content review, regulatory participation, follow-up communication on meeting highlights and issues)



Regulator/Community Comments Tell the Story

“I want to thank everyone...for the care and diligence you show in professionally exercising your duties to protect the public. It brings me a great deal of comfort to know the level of expertise being brought to bear on the lab’s remedial activities.” - Mike Maraviglia, SCDHS

“Cleanup goals have been openly determined and shared with community representatives via the CAC for timely communication. All aspects of the cleanup program are deemed vital to ensure that no segment is overlooked in the final analysis.” Tom Talbot, Middle Island Civic Association.

“I’m pleased with BNL and DOE especially considering the number of sites included in the cleanup. The annual groundwater summary is helpful and serves as one-stop shopping for information on the groundwater treatment systems. IAG calls have been a big help and make it easy to keep track of the projects. The working relationship is non adversarial.” Doug Pocze, EPA

“I’m very impressed and extremely happy with the way things are going with the cleanup at BNL. This is one of the easiest sites to deal with as everything that I would expect to be addressed has been. It has been an interesting and rewarding experience to be involved with the IAG for the past seven years.” Steve Karpinski, NYSDOH

“Through the CAC and the presentations made by the cleanup groups and affiliated scientists, we were able to grasp a clean understanding of the activities taking place and progress being accomplished.” Mike Giacomaro, East Yaphank Civic Association.

What we have learned

- Proactive outreach to our environmental regulators helps build trust and cooperation
 - We continue to provide annual briefings and frequently engage with local, state, and federal regulators (monthly teleconference calls)
- Informing and engaging the community in Lab operations and decision making results in better solutions
 - CAC engagement in remediation planning, design, and execution
 - Outreach to local civic organizations
 - Builds a foundation of transparency and trust
 - Growing CAC interest in Lab science

