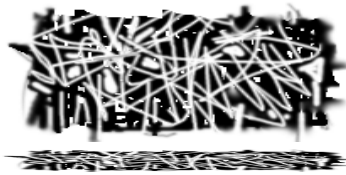


Contaminant Cleanup in Alaska's Villages and Rural Communities

The vast majority of contaminant cleanup needs in rural and village Alaska are largely due to historic and current military activities. These sites are often referred to as FUDs—*formerly used defense sites*—and most have been in existence for more than 50 years.



Guidelines for Success

by the
Environment and Natural Resources Institute
University of Alaska Anchorage

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Understanding the Context

Concern for Contaminants in Rural Alaska

There are over 500 FUDs—formerly used defense sites—in Alaska. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has determined approximately 123 of these need additional investigation on possible contaminants. On average, Alaska has more than twice the number of FUDs requiring investigation for contamination than other states. There may even be more, because the difference between the 123 and 500 sites is largely due to “no further action“ (NOFA) designations.

In the early 1980s NOFA determinations were made on many FUDs. These NOFAs, on a case-by-case basis, are now being reconsidered because of new investigative technologies and better understanding of the health and environmental hazards the potential contaminants may hold. In addition to these FUDs, there are also active military bases in Alaska—many of which have numerous mitigation or restoration activities being conducted.

Within the backdrop to the contaminant issue in Alaska is a widespread belief of Alaska Natives that their traditional lands were only to be “borrowed” for war purposes and Cold War military needs. This belief, along with many other issues, created distrust of the federal government. Despite this, Alaska Natives have been among the most patriotic citizens, with more enlisted wartime and peacetime veterans than almost any other ethnic group in our nation—veterans who speak with pride about their military service.

Rural Communities

- **Complex Laws and Regulations**
Communities find themselves entangled in a myriad of laws and regulations that don't allow them to comprehensively address the “ills” left on the land.
- **Traditional Economies and Lifestyles**
Rural communities have traditional economies and lifestyles that they rely on, appreciate, and prefer for physical, spiritual, and cultural sustenance.
- **History of Military Debris**
For more than fifty years communities have lived with debris that includes contaminants and 55-gallon drum dumps as well as abandoned buildings.
- **Diversity from Community to Community**
Alaska is home to 229 federally recognized tribes with diverse cultures.
- **Increased Cancer Risk**
Community members believe there is an increase of cancer-related illnesses and deaths, and link this (and other health issues) with the long-term contamination of traditional food and water resources.
- **Long-term Distrust**
Communities distrust governmental agencies, including the military, because they consider

these contaminant issues, as well as other concerns, unjust.

- **Complex Government-to-Government Relationships**
Communities and citizens lack an understanding of government-to-government relationships.

Military and Federal Agencies

- **New and Emerging Policies**
Agencies have new, specific responsibilities defined by federal law, executive orders and each agency's Native American policy. These policies are still taking shape and there are many uncertainties.
- **Complex Laws and Regulations**
Agencies are entangled in a myriad of laws and regulations that do not provide timely, clear-cut, comprehensive solutions to contaminant cleanup and FUDs.
- **Lack of Funding**
Annual appropriations fall far short of meeting requests for contaminant cleanup assessments and activities.
- **Responsibility and Accusation**
Employees find themselves feeling individually accused when agencies rather than employees should be held responsible.
- **Long-term Distrust**
Agencies are in long-term relationships with rural communities that do not trust them.
- **Complex Government-to-Government Relationships**
Agencies and the military lack an understanding of government-to-government relationships.

Guidelines: Recommended Activities

Rural Communities

Develop a strategic sense of what is most important to your community, and how the contaminant cleanup issue fits within the bigger picture for your community. A regional or other nonprofit corporation may be able to assist with this. For tribal communities, EPA's Tribal Environmental Office may also provide guidance.

Identify Available Resources

- Get to know contacts at organizations that can assist you in:
 - Understanding the technical aspects of contaminants
 - Testing and sampling
 - Agency/military decision making and budgeting processes.

These contacts may be with a regional nonprofit, university resources, state agencies (such as DEC), environmental nonprofits, or other third-party organizations.

- Your community may be associated with entities such as Alaska Municipal League or Alaska Inter-Tribal Council, or with agencies such as the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ATSDR), the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), or the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that have technical knowledge of contaminant issues, and federal and military cleanup and budgeting processes. If they don't have knowledge or information, encourage them to acquire it. Recognize that it's probably easier for these contacts to have face-to-face meetings with military and federal agency representatives. They can help rural communities expedite communications.

Find the Facts

- Develop or acquire technical knowledge about contaminants in your area, as well as the type of cleanup methods and the benefits, costs, and limitations of these methods.
- Find and hold discussions/conference calls with similar communities to yours in Alaska. The similarities might be based on the type of contaminant issues you're facing or the agency you need to work with. Also, look for a community that may have more experience than yours in addressing these concerns.

Working Directly with Agencies

- The community can request agencies to provide a wide variety of information. Ask for training, education, or written information regarding the agency's cleanup and budgeting procedures.
- If they don't have the knowledge or information, request their assistance to find it.
- Invite agency representatives to spend time in the community to initiate discussions with residents.

Continuing to Communicate

- Provide agencies with the ability and incentive to work together—act as a convener and bring together all involved with cleanup decisions and activities.
- Consider the value of using a facilitator for supporting communications at meetings with agencies.
- Encourage agencies to use the guidelines listed in this brochure.

Military and Federal Agencies

Communities—rural, tribal, and urban—want to participate with agencies in a collaborative, constructive manner. In order to be successful, agencies need to provide communities with opportunities to knowledgeably participate, to be collaborative, and to uphold the responsibilities they have to the land and their communities.

Planning to Meet with the Community

- Take cross-cultural training specific to Alaska, and if possible, learn about the particular village or community that you will be working with. Recognize you will only retain 10-20% of this type of training unless you frequently use it.
- Determine what relationships the community has with third-party entities such as regional nonprofits, university groups, environmental nonprofits, or other organizations. For example, the community may have some level of trust with groups such as Alaska Municipal League, or Alaska Inter-Tribal Council, RuralCAP, or with agencies such as ASTDR, DEC, and EPA.
- Make contact and establish a working relationship with these organizations, if appropriate.

Initiate a Relationship

- Schedule a visit when it will be most convenient to the community.
- Develop a “fact sheet” of what the agency anticipates will happen in the short term (year) and longer term (closeout) in that particular community; update fact sheets periodically.
- Spend time in the community (at least two days) and, if possible, arrange for someone from an organization with an established relationship with the community to also be present. This person can provide a communication bridge between you and the community.
- Talk with community residents—particularly mayors, chiefs, and village and city council members—to gain an understanding and history of the community, how it wants to work with the agency, and which issues are most important.

Meeting with the Community

- At the beginning and end of your visits, use a community meeting to introduce yourself; review in brief your purpose, your role, and what you plan to do during your visit; review what you have heard from community members; and let them know your next steps.
- Provide the community with information about options of how to work with you, (e.g. series of community meetings, establish a RAB, work with village or city council).
- Begin the site assessment by asking community members to identify contaminant issues including the physical locations that they either know of or believe exist.
- Consider the value of using a facilitator to support communications at community meetings.

Continuing to Communicate

- Follow through in a timely manner with any activities agreed to by your agency during discussions and meetings!
- Hire a local resident to serve as the agency’s community liaison.
- Over the life of the project, keep communication open through your community liaison, third-party entities, and the participatory model the community chooses. Good communication needs to be consistently a two-way process.
- Encourage communities to use the guidelines listed in this brochure.

Between Tribal Governments and Agencies

Over the past several years, the federal government has been emphasizing its relationship with Native Americans through presidential executive orders and the development of specific policies for agencies. Because there are 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska, the communication challenges are many. At the same time, navigating the numerous federal bureaucracies is time-consuming, complicated, and frustrating for tribes.

Guidelines for Tribal Governments

- Use the *Guidelines for Success* for your communities.
- Read the agencies' Native American policies. Understand your rights and responsibilities as a government.
- Develop relationships with federal agency Native liaisons.
- Develop relationships with project level staff at federal and military agencies, DEC, and contractors working in your community. Keep them informed of your projects and progress.

Guidelines for the Military and Federal Agencies

- Project staff should be familiar with government-to-government policies for their agencies.
- Formal contact should be directed to the tribal chair, in writing. Provide the tribe with the name and contact information for the native liaison personnel in your agency and information about programs and support available to the tribe.
- Send letters with your travel schedule far in advance of all travel addressed to the community, nonprofit native organization, and the tribal government.
- Contact the EPA Tribal Liaisons Office and learn about the community or agency from EPA's perspective.

Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP)

NALEMP is a new means to address the impacts of military and federal activities on tribal lands, such as lands associated with ANCSA ownership and areas traditionally used for hunting and gathering food. Currently, NALEMP is administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for FUDs. NALEMP is recommended as a model for establishing and continuing constructive relationships in order to address issues of contaminant and debris removal in rural Alaska. The NALEMP model should be reviewed by federal and military agencies and used to the degree possible for this purpose. Hopefully, Congress will clarify the policy language as to whether NALEMP is to be limited to FUDs issues or if it can be used wherever Native lands have been impacted by contaminants or debris due to federal uses.