1.1 Environmental Services Strategic Plan

Stakeholder Interview Questions

Background

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Tacoma Pierce County Health Department


Rob Olson – Staff – Underground Storage Tanks (UST). Removal of old gas facilities/ compliance with legacy, clean-up, enforcement, voluntary cleanup. DOE #s – look at non UT, improper handling, surface spill.

Brad Harp - Water Resource Program – Rob works for him, surface water, toxic algae, septic, sewage, chambers creek, SSOs, buried/water/surface, storm camera program, $match, legacy sites

Inter-departmental questions to send in advance

1. **What does your vision for Tacoma’s environment look like in 20 years?**
   - Underground Storage Tank regulations aren’t going anywhere. We’ll have lesser capacity to respond to small spills – that will go away in 2 years.
   - Funding for DOE and regulatory support are going away in the near term less opportunities for grants, etc. We have worked for a long time on voluntary compliance in the community without the regulatory authority.
   - TPCHD is hoping to initiate internal authority to regulate and enforce contaminated site cleanups (quasi MTCA program). Opportunity for more local control.
   - We are hopeful, but concerned. There will always be the STGWPD and more people and more cars are going to put stress on the system and it will be a gargantuan challenge to keep up. We are feeling the pressure now - only 300 in TPCHD and of those Environmental Health is a small portion. Resourcing is going to be an issue.
   - We are concerned with Contaminants of the Future. Nanotechnology and fabrics of the future; how will we meet the future contaminant?
   - We’ll have largely moved past the stigma of a dirty, industrial blue-collar town. We’ve largely done that now – Thea Foss is a good example.

2. **What do you view as the biggest strengths and weaknesses of ES?**
   - We get pushback from the City on legacy sites. The Goldfish as example; the City was funding development without considering that it was a contaminated site.
   - We don’t know enough about what each of our Departments do, in particular how it relates to community health. We can usually find people via our personal contacts we’ve developed
over years, but we don’t really understand what each other does. There may be untapped opportunities based on limited resources.

- Society takes TPCHD for granted. We are a victim of complacency. We need to put value on health and utilities are integral in that. We need to share that message and show that together we keep people healthy and safe.
- We need to work on our messaging together. Health can have a powerful message around what ES does environmentally.
- Individual team members at ES are good to work with and have had strong relationships for years.

3. **How could communications and cooperation be improved between our departments?**

- Building officials approve work without considering the public health statutes. The City doesn’t get that improving public health (what TPCHD does) makes for a stronger economy and better living environment. Environmental health launches community development.
- Degradation of utilities allow for contaminant transport. Utility trenches. Failure to clean-up and focus may lead to additional “parties” in future clean-ups.
- Need to coordinate with each other. We meet with Pierce County SWM and the Conservation District quarterly to keep informed of what we’re doing. We don’t do that with the City.
- There’s no agency one-on-one dialog. We got to the Environmental Services Commission, but we just sit there and listen to what ES is doing.
- TPCHD doesn’t have the capacity to do the politicking and hand shaking. We don’t get the exposure and can’t deliver the importance of our message like ES.
- Economic development is given priority and health seems to “be in the way.” Addressed when convenient, but sometimes treated as an adversary.
- Linkages specifically to construction and CED are tenuous and hard to maintain. DOE/TPCHD have maps that show the sites and there is interest in being proactive, but TPCHD resourcing is limited. There are aspirations to be more proactive/willingness, just not able to physically address it all.
- TPCHD is brought into play reactively with the City. We’re case-specific to you. We need to have better long-term planning together.
- Our (joint?) emergency response planning is non-existent. Our respective roles are not identified in the event of an emergency.
- We don’t know how your side sewer manual requires connectivity for septic systems. We need to communicate better where we overlap. What about surfacing effluents?
- Several members on Board of Health are also on City/County councils.
- Understanding of interlocal agreements of TPCHD and City and where they overlap. We do a good job of getting notified and agencies typically know if they have a SAD, but we could get better unbiased info from TPCHD.

4. **How could ES better serve its customers?**

- Recognize that Economy + Health = Better. A communication strategy around this could be helpful.
- Need to recognize contaminated sites need a higher priority. Need support and acknowledgment that cleaning up contaminated sites reduces transport of pollutants and liability.
5. **Is there anything your department has planned in the next 20 years which could impact Environmental Services, such as major initiatives, policies, or codes?**

- We need to look at the South Tacoma Groundwater Protection District permitting program. Is it viable to keep that in TPCHD? Impacts ES and TPU. Currently only 0.5 FTE serving groundwater.