

## Hanford Advisory Board Draft Advice

**Topic:** In Person State of the Site Meetings and Technical Webinars

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**Originating Committee:** Public Involvement

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### Background

The Hanford Advisory Board (HAB, Board) has long advocated for opportunities for the public to interact in person with Hanford decision makers<sup>1</sup>. The practice of holding regional State of the Hanford Site meetings has occurred for more than a decade and has been supported by the Tri-Party Agreement (TPA) agencies<sup>2</sup>.

For the spring of 2017, the TPA agencies propose to experiment with one State of the Site webinar in place of in-person meetings. This is of concern to the Board.

In-person meetings and webinars serve different purposes. It is a core Board value for the agencies to involve the public in cleanup decision making. The HAB Values White Paper<sup>3</sup> clarifies this by saying: “The public should have meaningful opportunities to influence cleanup decisions through open and transparent processes;” State of the Site meetings emulate these values.

While webinars are excellent tools for sharing information, they do not best serve a two-way conversation or provide meaningful opportunities for the public to influence cleanup decisions. Webinars are an impersonal tool for a controlled exchange. With a mediator screening questions and deciding when to unmute participant’s phone lines, it is not possible to “read the room” on a webinar and adapt remarks and information for the audience in real-time. It is also not possible for attendees to meet and connect with each other before, during, and after a webinar, which are valuable features of in-person meetings.

The Board believes that State of the Site meetings are much better suited for in-person meetings where a face-to-face exchange of ideas and information is personal, memorable, adds value, and makes it possible to clarify remarks and build understanding. The Board believes that in-person meetings demonstrate a true commitment to the goals of transparency and public policy deliberation. Webinars do not provide the same meaningful opportunities to comment and interact with others that are provided by in-person meetings. In the past, public interest groups have been instrumental in turning out interested members of the public for State of the Site meetings outside of the Tri-Cities, with 70-200 people participating per meeting in Seattle, Portland, and Hood River.

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<sup>1</sup> Past advice on State of the Site meetings and agency responses to this advice are worth revisiting. See advice [#50](#) and [agency response, #191](#) and [agency response, #222](#) and [agency response, and #261](#).

<sup>2</sup> **Agency response to advice #191, June 2006:** “The Hanford Federal Facility Agreement and Consent Order (Tri-Party Agreement [TPA]) agencies have found the SOS meetings to be a valuable forum for sharing information on the status of cleanup and hearing first-hand the public’s values, issues, and concerns. We believe that opportunities for a candid and meaningful dialogue between Hanford’s decision-makers and the public are an important component of our public involvement efforts.” [http://www.hanford.gov/files.cfm/HAB\\_TPAResponse191.pdf](http://www.hanford.gov/files.cfm/HAB_TPAResponse191.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.hanford.gov/files.cfm/HAB\\_20130-01\\_ValuesWhitePaper\\_Attach.pdf](http://www.hanford.gov/files.cfm/HAB_20130-01_ValuesWhitePaper_Attach.pdf)

The Board believes the TPA agencies could successfully use webinars to share technical information and updates about specific cleanup projects with the public. The Board does not believe webinars should replace in-person State of the Site meetings, but rather provide a supplemental format for information sharing throughout the year.

## **Advice**

### **State of the Site Meetings**

The Board advises the TPA agencies to hold multiple, regional, in-person State of the Site meetings to allow the public to hear about cleanup successes and challenges directly from site decision-makers and provide an opportunity for members of the public to share values, issues and concerns that could inform the TPA managers as they make decisions about Hanford cleanup.

### **Technical Webinars**

The HAB advises the TPA agencies to use the spring 2017 webinar to tackle a specific technical topic, such as treating Hanford's tank waste, Plutonium Finishing Plant demolition, 618-10 cleanup, or 300 Area uranium plume immobilization. The Board advises the TPA agencies to consider hosting webinars like this regularly (four-six times a year). It would be ideal if presenters would respond to clarifying questions during the presentation to ensure understanding and be responsive to varying levels of participant knowledge. This would also enable the public and presenters to have a clearer discussion and better understanding of the issues and cleanup remedies.

Basic components of a topic-focused webinar could include:

- High-level overview of cleanup project
  - Origin of contamination
  - Risk to environment, workers, and public
  - How contamination is removed/treated and where it ends up
  - Final cleanup goal
- Detailed information about the status of the cleanup project, including challenges
- Start to finish timeline (including long-term stewardship and institutional controls if relevant)
- Comments and questions (which could be submitted before the webinar and electronically or by phone during the webinar itself).