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Communicating Credibly in an Incredible Environment–Yucca Mountain Public Outreach Tools and Techniques

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ABSTRACT

Open disclosure and public understanding of major issues surrounding the Yucca Mountain Project is a consistent goal for Clark County, Nevada, which represents nearly 80 percent of Nevada's total population. Recent enhancements to the County's communication methods employ emerging technology as well as traditional public relations tactics. The County's communication methods engage the public through highly visual displays, exhibits, informative and entertaining video programs, school presentations, creative print inserts, public interaction and news media.

The program provides information based on the county's research studies and findings on property values, the environment, tourism, public health and safety, increased costs for emergency services and the potential disproportionate effects to Native American tribes and other minority populations in the area.

Multi-cultural Dialogue

Nevada, particularly southern Nevada and the Las Vegas area, has experienced explosive growth in the last decade. The fastest growing demographic group in Nevada is Hispanics (nearly 23% in Las Vegas) and Asians (approx. 8%). Clark County's Nuclear Waste's Multi-cultural Program is designed to reach residents from these emerging segments of our population.

Educational video programs

While officially opposed to the project, Clark County is committed to providing Nevada residents with accurate, timely and objective information about Yucca Mountain and its potential impacts to our state. Since the actual operation of the repository, if approved by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, is about a decade away, the program includes presentations for middle and high school students on age-appropriate topics.

Work with indigenous tribes

American Indian tribes in Southern Nevada participated in an unprecedented video program presenting the unique views and perspectives of the American Indian tribes directly impacted by the proposed repository.

Monitoring program

To track economic, fiscal and social changes over time, the monitoring program is comprised of indicators in several core areas, including indicators of environmental, economic, community well being, fiscal, developmental and public health and safety. Its purpose is to highlight and monitor the most meaningful indicators of performance and perception in key service areas. The monitoring program is promoted within the public outreach program to make Nevada residents aware of this important resource of information.

Internet Activities

Interactive quizzes, informational postings, electronic newsletters and podcasts draw a demographic that prefers getting information from computer sources. Lively, interesting and ethnically diverse podcast episodes provide access to audio shows, which can be downloaded, to MP3 players or to a standard computer.

INTRODUCTION

Yucca Mountain is a proposed national high-level nuclear waste repository located 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. While officially opposed to the Yucca Mountain Project, Clark County is committed to providing Nevada residents with accurate, timely and objective information about Yucca Mountain and its potential impacts to our state.

Clark County strives to provide opportunities for all Southern Nevadans to be informed, be involved, and be heard. We communicate in understandable, non-technical terms to engage the public and local stakeholder groups, and strengthen stakeholder relationships.

Clark County's multi-cultural, multi-generational and multi-faceted approach to public outreach is unique to the Yucca Mountain Project. For example, not only are publications such as fact sheets translated to both Spanish and Chinese, but video productions about Yucca Mountain are also narrated in Spanish. News releases and features are routinely offered and published in Spanish and Chinese newspapers. Radio interviews and speaker presentations and also done in Spanish.

In addition to county-wide activities, Clark County participates in minority community special events such as the Chinese New Year Festival, Mexican Independence Day, Chilean Independence Day and Israel Independence event. To further promote the informational program, display inserts to promote the Web site have been published in mainstream English publications as well as Spanish and Chinese publications.

Multi-Cultural outreach

Objectives:

- Reach key opinion leaders in the Latin and Asian communities
- Conduct presentations to culturally targeted groups
- Increase Web site traffic

Results in past year:

- Met with 15 key Latin and Asian opinion leaders and editors
- More than 20 individual presentations and exhibits
- Web site hits increased by 35%

The credibility achieved by this program helped generate interest and participation from various publics who had not previously voiced their concerns and opinions on Yucca Mountain and the transportation of nuclear waste.

Video Productions

We've produced 14 videos for broadcast over cable television and in the community and school presentations during the past four years. For example, the "Radiation Basics" video is a simple, straightforward explanation of the properties of radiation, atoms, nuclear fission and the beneficial aspects of radiation. The production uses bright colors, lively music, a professional actor and originally created animation. Because Yucca Mountain is a controversial topic, and we want students to learn to develop opinions their own, we do not discuss Yucca Mountain in this video. In terms of measurement, the greatest success of this project was its acceptance by the Clark County School District. The Curriculum Department endorsed "Radiation Basics" and posted it on the district-wide Intranet, generating a steady stream of requests. The program is also regularly shown on public cable station 4 in Las Vegas. In addition, science teachers and students can view the program on the cable education station.

Electronic Newsletters

Released on an as-needed basis, electronic newsletters are short, punchy and timely. Newsletters are e-mailed only to citizens who request it, usually through sign-up sheets available at community events.

The newsletters cover diverse subjects from upcoming events to current news media items. Opportunities for public involvement and/or participation are emphasized. The distribution list is staunchly guarded and used for no other purpose than sending the e-newsletter.

Podcasts

Clark County was the first government entity in the state to produce a podcast on any issue in Nevada, and to our knowledge have the only podcast series dedicated to Yucca Mountain issues in the country. We've recorded 10 podcasts so far on a variety of issues, allowing us to reach a wider Clark County audience, and engage the younger members of our community. Our Web site has seen an increase in use of 60%; our outreach events

have increased to over 20 per year, and considering our steady population growth of over 5,000 residents per month, it is no small feat to reach out to such a diverse, ever-changing audience.

Why podcast? In the United States alone, it is estimated that 11 million households will own an MP3 player by the end of 2006. By 2010, 34.5 million households will own MP3 player. More than 70 million iPods have been sold and of those, 700,000 households currently listen to podcasts. By 2010 12.3 million households will listen to podcasts. *International figures are not reflected on these figures*

Source: Forrester Research April 2006

Clark County takes every opportunity to publicize the podcasts, such as in the Spanish informational publication below:

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.