

# RESIDENTIAL RELOCATIONS

## DESCRIPTION

Individuals and families are relocated from their homes when their health is threatened or residences must be razed for remedial action to be effective. The purpose of a temporary or permanent relocation of residents is to protect human health or the environment.

## REQUIRED ACTIVITY?

Yes or no, depending on the situation. Most sites do not require that residents be moved from their homes. However, when EPA determines that a relocation is necessary, that relocation must then be carried out in a timely fashion, and in accordance with the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act of 1970 (42 USC § 4601 *et. seq.*).

Information on EPA policy regarding temporary and permanent residential relocation, and tools for implementation, can be found at [www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/topics/relocation/](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/topics/relocation/). Guidance on temporary relocation as part of the remedy at a Superfund site can be found at [www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/topics/relocation/tempreloc.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/topics/relocation/tempreloc.pdf). The interim policy on permanent relocation can be found at [www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/topics/relocation/intpol.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/topics/relocation/intpol.pdf).

## MAKING IT WORK

### WHEN TO USE

Community involvement must be done expeditiously and early in the relocation process. EPA cannot wait until the decision to relocate has been made to involve the community. By that time, citizens may have involved the media (sometimes by placing negative ads in newspapers) or contacted private attorneys on their behalf. A CIC who begins the process at this point would have an uphill battle in completing the relocation. Instead, remember that community involvement during residential relocations are most effective when:

- CICs are involved early in the process;
- EPA's role is defined in a *Community Involvement Plan* before going to the community;
- Communication among agencies is discussed before going to the community to avoid inconsistencies in information; and
- The CIC establishes a bond with the community early in the process.

The CIC works directly with the affected residents first, and then involves the media. Affected residents should never hear news affecting them from the media first, unless it is an actual emergency in progress. In addition, caution should be used when involving local officials; they should be informed at the same time you are informing residents. Informing officials first might result in leaks to the media; informing officials afterward may result in irate calls from the informed public to the official, for which the official would be ill prepared.

### HOW TO USE

Here are a few situations to avoid:

- Different agencies hand out conflicting information at the beginning of the process
- Residents are *informed* instead of *involved* at early stages
- The CIC only has contact with residents during public meetings



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Tab 10](#)



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Involvement  
Plans, Tab 7](#)

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- EPA begins talking to residents after the relocation has been decided; or
- An undefined EPA role breeds confusion and resentment from residents

EPA is currently developing policy on how to conduct relocations. The absence of a policy suggests that the CIC use caution when covering new ground. As the CIC, your primary role is to be the EPA *Spokesperson* to the affected community on Superfund matters. As such, you are to be honest, straightforward, and non-confrontational. This role involves the skillful facilitation of the flow of information in matters of public concern. Your secondary role is to serve as an advisor to the Remedial Project Manager (RPM) or other site team members to ensure they are aware of the human element involved in their actions. For instance, you may have to tactfully remind site team members that a home is more than a building or an investment: it is the family's life in a capsule.

Because razing houses and condemning property are highly emotional topics, the CIC must use extreme caution and excellent judgement when addressing such topics. Residential relocations can be the most challenging aspect of community involvement at a site. To help you meet this challenge, some general principles are listed below:

**HUMANIZE THE PROCESS:** No matter how many meetings you hold, no matter how many fact sheets you hand out, the community simply will not trust you unless you get to know them. Residents who are scared are more likely to contact a lawyer than to read an EPA fact sheet. *Informal Activities* allow you to establish a rapport with residents so that they are comfortable with EPA's involvement. It is essential that you spend time with the community to understand their concerns. In this way, you can negotiate with empowered people and thus avoid negotiations with lawyers.

**Talk About Risk:** It is important to make sure that the residents understand one issue in particular: *risk*. Most problems with residents occur when a confused populace think that their lives are threatened by invisible toxins in the air, the earth, and in their homes. *Risk Communication* allows you to relay information in a non-technical manner.

**CREATE A Solid ORGANIZATION:** It is important to become respected by the community, and a large part of that is accomplished through good organization. Internally, you must coordinate efforts with the RPM or other EPA officials to ensure that conflicting information is not distributed. In addition, you should keep in close contact with other agencies at the site (*e.g.*, ATSDR) to ensure that no misunderstandings occur. Typically, the other agency most likely to be involved is the US Army Corps of Engineers (COE), and coordination with COE is often paramount to success.

**CREATE A RELOCATION SECTION IN THE *INFORMATION REPOSITORY*:** A central repository for information regarding relocation needs to be established. This section should be sized appropriately relative to the scope of the relocation effort (*i.e.*, a larger center may be required if many families are involved). This relocation section should provide information on residents' rights during a relocation, fact sheets, and booklets on the site, information on chemicals at the site, and other necessary materials residents can use. Ensure that the site is centrally located and well-advertised. In addition to a repository, you can try using electronic mediums like a bulletin board or World Wide Web site to provide information. A hotline or counseling services might be other options.

**USE THE TOOLS AVAILABLE:** Several EPA Regions have already developed tools to help community members understand the Superfund and Relocation processes. Furthermore, communities may already be well-organized, which can provide an easy way to reach out to the whole

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[See Informal Activities, Tab 20](#)



[See Risk Communication, Tab 37](#)



[See Information Repository, Tab 21](#)



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community. If there is a *Community Advisory Group* (CAG) at the site, coordinate relocation outreach activities with that group. CAG members can be trained through workshops to understand the complexities involved with a relocation.

**INTERACT WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS:** Other community groups may have already begun to organize for a fight with EPA on the relocation. Meet with these groups *before* conflicts arise and provide any information they need to know. The CIC should remain the point of contact for residents throughout the entire resolution. It is important that this person establish a personal relationship with the community, thereby providing a contact for residents to call.

## Tips

- Start early
  - The earlier you begin, the more likely you can avoid conflicts.
- Be consistent
  - Providing conflicting information to residents will breed mistrust. Review any information that is going out to ensure that it will not contradict any of the previous information that was given out (if possible). A good relationship with other agencies can ensure cooperation and avoid the government giving residents differing facts.
- Get to know the community
  - Establishing a personal relationship with residents is crucial. It is up to you to find out exactly what residents want. Informational newsletters and fact sheets can only do so much.
- Communicate effectively
  - Residents need to understand the risks involved and what rights they have in the relocation. Employ good *Risk Communication* techniques to not only tell the community about actions that are taking place, but to get their opinions to incorporate them into the decision making process. Public meetings that involve the community in creating the site's relocation plan will empower the residents to work with EPA for a successful relocation.
  - It is important to try and meet with every affected resident, in person, to explain the situation and the options. One approach could involve holding small group meetings with the affected residents. These workgroups could work more closely with the CIC and the RPM.
- Leave nothing to chance
  - Make sure that you distribute a written guide covering everything relocation arrangements. This should be written in clear and concise language. It should be reviewed paragraph by paragraph with the affected residents to make sure that they understand it, and it should be signed by the residents. If the CIC is not directly involved in negotiations, forward these suggestions to the EPA personnel involved.
  - For example, be very clear and precise that the resident is responsible for making mortgage or rent payments on their old house while they are relocated; that EPA will make the payments at the new dwelling; that EPA is responsible for security at the old dwelling; and that EPA is responsible for the condition of the new dwelling.
- Designate a *Spokesperson*
  - Select one CIC (or RPM in some cases) to be the point of contact through the entire resolution. This person should visit the community and understand their concerns.



[See  
Community  
Advisory  
Groups,  
Tab 4](#)

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[See Media,  
Tab 25](#)



[See Trans-  
lation  
Services,  
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- Related to this effort, designate a community liaison with the city. The local government might have a better means of communicating with citizens than a Federal agency.
- Designate a **Media** coordinator. The media can be an ally or enemy in the relocation process. If all information sent to the media is consistent and correct, you are more likely to have a better relationship with the press.
- Try to know the language spoken by the affected community. **Translation Services** may be employed to ensure all outreach materials and correspondence are in the language that a resident can best understand. Use non-technical language.
- Address property maintenance issues. The site should be well protected to alleviate residents' concerns especially for a temporary relocation.
- Address environmental justice concerns. At many sites with a large population of minority citizens, social justice may be an issue. These issues must be addressed at meetings, and all interested parties should be able to voice their concerns.
- Present the community with a range of options. Rather than listing only one recommended option, empower the residents by listing multiple alternatives for the relocation process.
- Finally, the CIC should be prepared to explain to those families not being relocated, but who live near someone who is being relocated, why they are not at risk.

## RELATED TOOLS IN THE TOOLKIT

- [Public Availabilities/Poster Sessions, Tab 30](#)
- [Community Advisory Groups, Tab 4](#)
- [Community Involvement Plans, Tab 7](#)
- [Informal Activities, Tab 20](#)
- [Exhibits, Tab 13](#)
- [Information Repository, Tab 21](#)
- [Internet, Tab 10](#)
- [Media, Tab 25](#)
- [Public Meetings, Tab 32](#)
- [Risk Communication, Tab 37](#)
- [Spokesperson, Tab 39](#)
- [Translation Services, Tab 43](#)
- [Workshops, Tab 46](#)