

Community Engagement At Leaking Underground Storage Tank Sites*

**Community engagement activities at LUST sites vary, depending on site conditions and remedies.*

Top Stop Gas Station
15 South Main Street
Gunnison, Utah

History And Site Activities

In July and August 2007, about 21,000 gallons of gasoline leaked from an underground storage tank (UST) at the Top Stop gas station in Gunnison, Utah. The gasoline migrated to the groundwater table at about 10-13 feet below ground surface, then horizontally under Main Street. Sanpete County HAZMAT and Utah's Department of Environmental Quality responded to the emergency. Several businesses on Main Street were temporarily evacuated due to strong gasoline fumes. Underground storage tanks at the gas station were removed. Soil vapor extraction systems were installed in trenches under both sides of Main Street and under houses overlying the gasoline plume.



Soil vapor extraction trench in Main Street

Multiple subsurface investigations indicated that within about two months of the release, the gasoline plume migrated over one-quarter mile from the gas station under several houses. Additional soil vapor extraction systems were installed to remediate subsurface contamination and sub-slab venting systems were installed to mitigate vapors coming into buildings. Utah's Department of Environmental Quality Petroleum Storage Tank Trust Fund paid \$1,000,000 (the maximum coverage) in less than one year from the release discovery.

As of September 2010, the Top Stop gas station site is vacant; however, Gunnison City acquired the property in a legal settlement and plans to redevelop the site. Soil vapor extraction, groundwater remediation, indoor air sampling, soil gas sampling, and groundwater sampling are ongoing. Utah's Department of Environmental Quality is providing regulatory oversight, as well as information to community officials and citizens on pertinent issues.

Community Engagement Activities

Impacts to the community were immediate and widespread. Local community members demanded action and they are still actively involved. The release gained media attention, making headline news in state and local broadcasts, as well as major newspapers. Utah's Department of Environmental Quality staff participated in television and newspaper interviews; they also regularly attended city council meetings to provide community members with information. Central Utah's Health Department distributed informational flyers with advice on what to do if citizens smelled gasoline fumes and who to contact.

Top Stop's consultant, Wasatch Environmental, distributed fliers door-to-door and published advertisements in the local newspaper to notify community members about the 30-day public comment period for the draft corrective action plan, which was made available for review at the Gunnison City building, local library, and on Utah's Department of Environmental Quality website. A public meeting was held to address issues raised during the public comment period and the final CAP was distributed.

Gunnison City and Utah's Department of Environmental Quality regularly update their websites to provide community members with up-to-date site information. In addition, Utah's Department of Environmental Quality staff regularly attend city council meetings to provide status updates and answer questions regarding site remediation progress. Utah's Department of Environmental Quality project manager is on site during sampling and remediation activities. Utah's Department of Environmental Quality maintains communication with Gunnison City's mayor and city council, Gunnison City's Remediation Board, and the Casino Star Theater Restoration Committee.



Emergency basement ventilation

Program Changes Due To Gunnison Release

In early 2010, Utah's legislature passed a law increasing the Petroleum Storage Tank Trust Fund coverage to \$2,000,000 per release. This law also provides money for people with off-site impacts to hire their own consultant to oversee work being conducted by a responsible party's consultant. The legislature also tripled the low interest loan fund limits to encourage upgrading or replacing old steel underground storage tanks.

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Community Engagement Lessons Learned

- **Make regular phone and in-person contact with key individuals** – this can reduce frustration or panic about information, or lack of it. Identify key players and contact them regularly to keep them informed. Be available and reachable when people have concerns. Make sure people feel like you are willing to listen, address their concerns, and answer questions.
- **Speak honestly and plainly** – people don't always like the message, but they should be able to count on it to be accurate and straightforward. Most people will understand your message, but continue reaching out for the benefit of those who need or want more information.
- **Be an intermediary** – tensions between parties on opposite sides of lawsuits escalated to the point where there was no communication or trust. Often a request from a regulator (for things that may help understanding, but are not necessarily required) will generate a beneficial response. By the same token, a demand by a property owner may be tempered with the same intermediary involvement.
- **Keep technical jargon to a minimum** – detailed toxicology and overly technical geologic or engineering explanations only confused and angered people.
- **Explaining laboratory results is challenging** – initial indoor air sampling in several buildings indicated that benzene concentrations were higher than the toxicologically calculated 1-in-1,000,000 risk level of 0.3 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ for benzene. However, in many cases indoor air concentrations of benzene and other hydrocarbons were similar to background ambient outdoor air concentrations. Top Stop hired a firm with certified industrial hygienists to explain the air sampling results to the public.
- **Discourage technicians, or others who appear to be in a position of authority, from speaking about site activities outside of their area of expertise** – to ensure consistent and accurate messages, appoint a primary spokesperson who is readily available to community members and other affected stakeholders.
- **The severity of the release affects a community's level of interest** – underground storage tank releases like the one in Gunnison are rare in Utah. Generally, Utah's Department of Environmental Quality Tank Program does not receive questions or input from communities on most underground storage tank release sites. As the contamination in Gunnison spread and resulted in an increased impact, the release became a top news story which increased the community's interest.



Gasoline-contaminated groundwater plume in 2008



Soil vapor extraction trench through a pasture

For More Information

[Gunnison City Web Site](#)

[Utah UST-LUST Program](#)

[EPA Region 8 UST Program](#)