

NEW MEXICO'S SECTION 208 PROGRAM:
Public Participation

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A lot has been said today about public participation. Every speaker we've heard, and many of the audience participants, have addressed the problem of public involvement: how do we obtain it, how do we use it, and is our effort worthwhile.

We are all talking about public participation. I can only conclude, then, that the concept is of importance to us, the participants in this conference. In fact, this gathering is a beautiful illustration of real public participation. I've done a lot of listening today, and I've tried to observe the audience. I get the distinct impression that people have felt involved and have maintained an extraordinarily high level of interest in what's been said. In fact, I haven't observed any sleeping people! That is remarkable, considering that it's 4:00 p.m. and I am the last scheduled speaker.

The New Mexico Environmental Improvement Agency feels it is important to stimulate public interest in water quality issues and problems. The Section 208 water quality program provides us with a means of accomplishing two specific things:

- 1) Informing citizens about water quality in New Mexico;
- 2) Involving citizens in developing strategies for abating existing pollution and especially for preventing future pollution.

The process of "informing and involving" is not just desirable, it is also essential in the Section 208 planning program, if EIA is to produce a plan that has any chance of being successfully put to work. (Please note that I deliberately avoided the use of the term "implementated" here, in light of Ms. Ribe's comments about the language employed by bureaucrats). Everyone is fed up with studies and plans that sit on library shelves and collect dust. In order that the Section 208 plan not suffer that fate, it's vital that all citizens potentially touched or affected by water quality problems get into the act early, and make their needs known. Jim Agee, from EPA, told us that "208 is 75% politics and 25% technical information." We cannot forget this fact; it's the crux of public involvement's success, and thus of planning's success. But one of the first things

we must do is convince people that there are problems, or that there is the potential for problems relating to water quality. My able colleague, Catherine Callahan, told you our water in New Mexico is of good quality. How true - and how difficult, as a result, it is to make the case that Section 208 is worth the citizen's time today, before our problems become monstrous crises.

How are we obtaining this public participation? There are several points, rather philosophical and general concepts, which we stress:

- 1) Information and involvement must take place from the beginning to the end of the program;
- 2) Information and involvement must reach out to everyone affected by water quality problems; and
- 3) Information and involvement opportunities must cover the entire state of New Mexico.

Let's go back to point 1. Many aspects of the Section 208 program, such as our Detailed Work Plan, were presented to the public as early as summer 1976. We published issue #1 of the newsletter last August. We produced the Public Participation Program Work Plan in December 1976, before most of the work for Section 208 began. Both these documents set out what EIA and other agencies are doing, in both the technical and the public participation portions of the Section 208 program. We wanted to commit ourselves to producing certain outputs, conducting certain studies and activities. We wanted New Mexicans to know what to expect from 208, and how they might be affected. We don't want to surprise anyone.

Please look over the Public Participation Program Work Plan, to get a better idea of how the public can be informed and involved between now and November, 1978. If you would like a copy and did not pick one up before they disappeared, please tell me and I will send you one.

Point 2, that everyone affected must be involved: Well, everyone is affected--we all drink! How does this translate to "208"? EIA has identified a wide range of interests, which are receiving special attention. These include city and county officials, COG's, federal and state land management agencies, agriculture interests, mining and other industries, environmental and citizens' groups, and the unaffiliated citizen.

How are these interests being reached? The statewide Policy Advisory Committee, which was discussed in the morning session, has 11 representatives covering the above interest groups. The committee functions as an exchange point, informing EIA of its constituents' viewpoints and needs, while at the same time it carries information and status reports back to those it represents.

The Technical Advisory Task Force, which Bob Adams told you about, also brings a number of interests into the Section 208 planning process -- forest land owners and managers, lumber companies, and the like. The

Task Force is additionally providing guidance to EIA, assisting us in designing certain elements of the statewide Public Participation Program. EIA is conducting a number of activities and projects, to reach concerned interests directly. These include our quarterly newsletter (Section 208 News), a slide show, a traveling exhibit, mini-libraries in 35 locations around New Mexico, a photography contest, possibly a television program, meetings, workshops, and other activities. Many are designed primarily for the lay citizen, who lacks extensive technical knowledge.

The third point I made earlier, that public participation must be statewide, is one deserving emphasis. Too often in programs which make an effort to involve citizens, places like Albuquerque and Santa Fe receive attention while others are ignored. This approach is not being taken by EIA. Certainly the emphasis of the technical program varies throughout the state. However, water quality issues are important everywhere in New Mexico. Additionally, the results of a Section 208 project addressing a specific area could have relevance for other parts of the state. Five EIA regional office environmentalists are conducting a number of public participation activities, so that citizens everywhere in New Mexico can learn about the Section 208 program and how it affects them, and make sure EIA hears their opinions. For the Albuquerque Metro Area, the Middle Rio Grande Council of Governments is taking charge of public participation in Section 208 planning, using a program of activities similar to EIA's for the remainder of the state. As a number of speakers have mentioned, the inclusion of local officials in public involvement programs is crucial. The Council of Governments is working closely with elected officials in the Albuquerque Metro Area. EIA feels that local officials in the Albuquerque area are going to play a bigger role in "208" than those around the rest of the state will. For the remainder of the state, other interest groups, particularly those I have mentioned, many of which are represented at this conference, are important components of the Section 208 program.

My talk is an excellent example of what many bureaucrats tend to do: Talk endlessly about encouraging the public to talk. For this reason, I'm going to let you know just how you can become involved and speak up. First, if you did not receive a copy of the Public Participation Program Work Plan or the March Section 208 News, or if you wish to have your name placed on the Section 208 mailing list, please tell us. Everyone on the mailing list receives the quarterly newsletters, plus other announcements of interest. Your statements, both formal and informal, are welcome at any time. It is not necessary to bite your tongue until a meeting or hearing is scheduled.

Information on the program is available at the 35 mini-libraries around the state. We can supply you with a list of locations. In addition, we encourage you to contact the individual in your part of the state who is representing EIA for the Section 208 public participation program. These people -- and we, the planning staff -- can supply you with information and let you know about upcoming events in the program. The regional contacts are:

1. Regions I & III - EIA
Ken Cable
Los Lunas, New Mexico

Phone No.: 865-9797

2. Region II
Gerald Silva
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Phone No.: 827-5271

3. Region IV
Carl Woolfolk
Tucumcari, New Mexico

Phone No.: 461-1671

4. Region V
Victor Jones
Las Cruces, New Mexico

Phone No.: 523-4513

5. Region VI
Chuck Hennessee
Roswell, New Mexico

Phone No.: 623-6984

We are happy to speak to people about the program at any time. And in reference to Mally Ribe's comments on the lingo of bureaucrats, I must say that I really try not to use jargon where a substitute exists. I find that people - even those who work for governments - much prefer communicating in plain English.

As we were told by Mr. Comola, EPA reviews the public participation programs of its Section 208 grantees. New Mexico's program was evaluated in March of this year by a team visiting from Dallas. They seemed quite pleased with our public involvement efforts and plans. To my knowledge, New Mexico's statewide Section 208 program was unique in producing a public participation program work plan document. We stand behind it. However, it's not immutable. This work plan -- and we planners must be flexible. We must remain energetic, continue to reach new groups, and bring them into the program. Revisions must be made when necessary, so that components which aren't necessary can be dropped, and new activities or tactics added. This is a beginning; the idea of a "continuing planning process" implies "perpetual" public involvement in water quality planning issues. And, just as the technical Section 208 plan focuses on the special problem of New Mexico, we must ensure that the public participation program meets the needs and addresses the concerns of our state's citizens.

Thank you very much.