

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR TOWN MEETING GROUPS

Power Company Officials: Background Information

The power plant includes a dam and reservoir that ensure an adequate supply of cooling water. Your company's engineers control the rate of water release from the dam into the Snake River.

Normally, only relatively small volumes of water are released at any particular time. However, releasing large quantities of water from the dam is a standard way of preventing flooding. The last time such a large volume of water was released from the dam was 30 years ago. A fish kill was reported then, but the cause remained unknown. On that occasion, Riverwood and surrounding areas had experienced an unusually wet summer.

The dam, constructed in the 1930s, had the most current design of that time. Since then, its basic structure has not been modified.

Agricultural Cooperative Representatives: Background Information

Cooperative members in the Snake River valley include farmers and ranchers managing a variety of crops and livestock. Your cooperative assumes a proactive role in informing its members of current best practices and regulations regarding the use of agrochemicals and the management of wastes and runoff from fields and pastures.

Heavy rains present a problem for farmers. Although the rain is good for crops, it can wash away recently applied fertilizers and pesticides. This is not only expensive, but it can cause problems if these substances wash into the watershed.

Mining Company Representatives: Background Information

Riverwood began as a mining town on the Snake River, which provided early residents with a source of water. Your company intensely mined the hills surrounding Riverwood in the 1930s and 1940s. The important metals mine from this area included zinc and silver. The by-products of mining and processing the metal ores were collected in storage ponds built in accordance with the specifications and regulations of that time.

In seasons with average rainfall, the runoff from the waste ponds contains heavy-metal ions at levels within the values specified by your company's EPA permit. Your company monitors effluent values and keeps the ponds secured. Your company's structural engineers are responsible for upkeep of storage ponds at abandoned mine sites. However, during heavy rainfall, some underground settling in the mines and avalanches in hilly areas of the Snake River have been noted.

Scientists: Background Information

You are responsible for explaining how the analyzed data support the proposed cause of the fish kill. You should be prepared to explain what the data mean and why data fluctuations are noted from month to month or year to year. You may be called on to explain concepts such as pH, solubility of molecular and ionic substances, units of concentration, water-purification techniques, the hydrologic cycle, and other water-related concepts. It is important that you help council members and other attendees understand how the analyzed data document the cause of the fish kill.

Consulting Engineers: Background Information

Your consulting firm was hired to do a detailed examination of the cause of the fish kill. Your task was to determine whether accident, human error, negligence, or an unforeseen circumstance was responsible for the Riverwood crisis. In addition, you were asked to prepare scenarios or suggest improvements that would prevent recurring fish kills.

Your presentation should include the proposed solutions, the costs and benefits of each solution, and a detailed analysis of the cause. It is understood that you may not be familiar with cost analyses of major projects; however, you should try to make feasible estimates.

Chamber of Commerce Members: Background Information

Canceling the annual fishing tournament cost you and other Riverwood merchants a substantial sum of money. Close to one thousand out-of-town tournament participants were expected. Many would have rented rooms for at least two nights and eaten at local restaurants and fast-food establishments. In anticipation of this business, extra food supplies and support services were ordered. Fishing and sporting goods stores stockpiled extra fishing supplies. Some businesses have applied for short-term loans to help pay for their unsold inventories.

Local churches and the high school planned family social activities as revenue makers during the tournament weekend. For example, the school band scheduled a benefit concert that would have raised money to send band members to the spring band competition.

People are likely to remember the fish kill for many years. Tournament organizers predict that future fishing competition revenues in Riverwood will be substantially reduced due to this year's adverse publicity. Thus total financial losses resulting from the water emergency may be much higher than most current estimates predict.

You should be able to discuss how merchants and businesses were affected by this event and summarize the availability of support (as well as lack of support) to help resolve the issues.

County Sanitation Commission Members: Background Information

You are responsible for the protection and safety of the Snake River water supply. You are the group that completes most of the routine water testing for the supply of drinking water in Riverwood. It is important to know what the standards that specify the quality of drinking water mean and to explain how the water testing is done. You should be able to report maximum contamination levels (MCLs) for hazardous water contaminants. You should also know the allowable limits or expected ranges for other analyzed water data.

Riverwood Taxpayer Association Members: Background Information

Your organization is concerned about the financial effects of the fish kill on Riverwood citizens. Thus some of the important questions to be answered at the town council meeting should be addressed in your presentation. These questions include:

- ◆ Who will pay for the water brought into Riverwood during the water shutoff?
- ◆ Will taxes be increased to compensate local businesspeople for their financial losses? (Keep in mind that local merchants themselves are likely to be Riverwood taxpayers!)
- ◆ If the organization responsible for the fish kill takes measures to prevent its recurrence, will the costs be passed on to consumers? If so, how?

Because your presentation may be influenced by the testimony of other groups, you may find it useful to obtain their written briefs before the council meeting, if possible.