

Communicating Across the Table

A Municipal Perspective on Engagement

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My Experience

- 1999 lawsuit against Longhorn Pipeline reversal in Austin, Texas
- Crossing highly sensitive environment – Sole source aquifer, endangered species
- Five year battle
 - No communication
 - Poor communication
 - Good communication
- Decades of experience working with communities on controversial environmental issues

Communication Between “Adversaries”

Three sides

1. Pipeline owners and operators
2. The public – Property owners, safety advocates, local government, neighborhoods
3. Regulators – Federal and state agencies

Each has their own roles, interests, motivations, and needs

Effective Communication

Honesty

- The most important factor. Without it there is no trust.
- Does not mean share everything
- Does mean don't mislead, hide, obfuscate, or lie
 - Don't hide behind "proprietary", "too technical", "entitled", "not required"
 - Be proactive in sharing information that you know will be wanted and in asking questions (no ambushes)
- Be clear about what you can and can't share and why

Effective Communication

Respect

- Each side's perspectives and motivation
- Most people aren't "horrible" or "evil", they have different needs, perspectives, motivations, and priorities
- Questioning positions or facts isn't disrespectful if it's done respectfully
- Respect intelligence – An engineering or advanced degree isn't required to understand pipeline technical issues or regulations
- Be willing to agree to disagree

Effective Communication

Acknowledgement

- Acknowledge and accept there are facts and perspectives that may be counter to your position, but are real and legitimate
- Example - Pipeline accidents and risk
 - They do have a very low probability of occurrence
 - They can have very high consequences

Acknowledge that both factors are true

Effective Communication

Longhorn outcome

- Fundamental disagreement between us (plaintiffs) and Longhorn/PHMSA
 - Shutdown time and consequences (risk)
- We lost, but we got:
 - Unprecedented protections in areas threatening aquifer
 - 19 miles of new pipe
 - Lined trench w/ concrete cap
 - Leak detection cable in trench
 - Spill containment outside trench
 - Good communication between Longhorn and City of Austin that continues today

Good communication occurs when there is a level of trust and understanding between the parties instead of hiding the ball or grandstanding.

TRUST BUT VERIFY