

EDUCATION OF THE PUBLIC ABOUT POTENTIAL HEALTH AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS ASSOCIATED WITH HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

Maria Pavlova

EPA - Region II  
26 Federal Plaza Room 737  
New York, NY 10278

A program is proposed to educate the public at the community level about potential health and environmental effects associated with exposure to hazardous substances. The program will complement and enhance the efforts of Community Relations Programs, which are required under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. The first stage will be an information needs assessment accomplished through discussions with citizens, a study of the community, and examination of existing sources of information. Based on this information, the next stage will be the preparation and dissemination of educational materials to explain the potential environmental and health risks in terms the people can understand and apply in the context of their community. The final stage will be a community-specific evaluation of the materials and program. Particular emphasis will be given to educating the public about what risk assessment means and how it is done. Such a public education program should allow citizens to take an active, informed role in the local decision-making process. In addition, educated citizens are more likely to take measures to monitor and protect their health and thus avert the occurrence of environmentally related disease.

KEY WORDS: Risk assessment, risk management, Community Relations Program, remedial response, environmental hazards.

There is a growing awareness among American communities about environmental hazards. This awareness is being expressed by citizens who are banding together to act in response to actual or potential environmental hazards in their local communities. EPA has recognized this awareness and the role of the public. When a remedial response is initiated under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), better known as Superfund, a Community Relations Program is required to encourage two-way communication between the people of the community and the Government Agencies involved (Fig.1).