INCORPORATING TECHNICAL INFORMATION AND COMMUNITY GOALS INTO RISK MANAGEMENT DECISION RELATED TO GROUNDWATER*

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ABSTRACT

Effective local groundwater management requires technical information which often must be provided by experts from outside the community who become intervenors. We have found that successfully weaving technical information into the decision making process of a community requires a sensitivity to the perspective of the community. Understanding the community context can allow an intervenor to develop technical information that is relevant to the immediate needs of the community. An effective partnership between the intervenor and key individuals in the community facilitates the development of realistic options, and usually leads to a positive outcome.

KEY WORDS: groundwater contamination, groundwater management, risk management, local government

INTRODUCTION

Groundwater management is a responsibility which local governments in New York State are beginning to address as a result of the increasing frequency of groundwater contamination incidents. Effective management requires technical information which often must be provided by experts from outside the community. The Water Resources Program at Cornell has been assisting communities through New York State in dealing with water quality issues. Our goal has been to help communities address the issues currently facing them in a manner that will leave them better prepared to face and deal with future water quality problems. We have also sought to develop and improve methods of assisting communities. The issue which we have dealt with most is groundwater protection which is the subject of this paper.

We have found that successfully weaving technical information into the decision making process of a community requires a sensitivity to the perspectives of the community, since every community we have worked with has approached the problems from a slightly different perspective. Groundwater quality is not always of primary importance to a community and, therefore groundwater management competes with other community goals.

This paper identifies three key components of intervention by outside experts in local groundwater management decisions which we have found from