



Environmental Cleanup Communication & Outreach Initiative

Interim Report: Installation Visits, March – May 2023

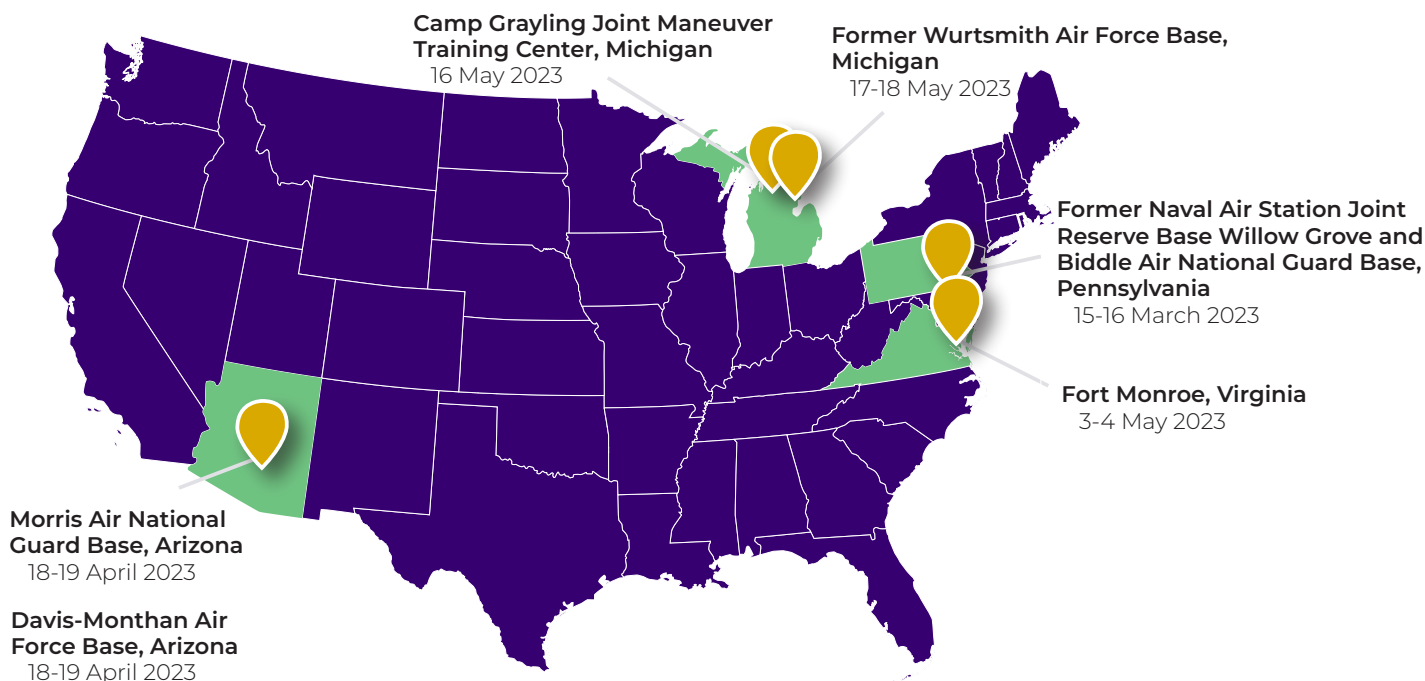


Overview

The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (ODASD), Environmental Management & Restoration (EM&R), launched the Department of Defense (DoD) Environmental Cleanup Communication & Outreach (ECCO) Initiative in the Fall of 2022 to enhance dialogue and communication with community residents, Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) members, environmental regulators, and other stakeholders. A priority of the ECCO Initiative is to examine the effectiveness of existing dialogue and communication methods currently used across the military departments and throughout the environmental cleanup process with RABs, community outreach events, and print, web, and social media. DoD intends to use lessons learned and findings from the initiative to inform best management practices, augment existing risk communication training, develop communication tools that DoD personnel can implement to better convey environmental cleanup information to the public and affected communities, and restructure the DoD PFAS website (www.defense.gov/PFAS) to create a better user experience. This interim summary highlights progress with the ECCO Initiative as of July 2023.

Approach

The ECCO Initiative team determined a hands-on approach to observing RABs and engaging with installation personnel, communities, and stakeholders would be the most practical method for capturing best management practices and lessons learned. In coordination with the military departments, the ECCO Initiative team assessed installations presently engaged in environmental cleanup actions to determine where the initial site visits could take place. The goal was to visit Army, Navy, and Air Force installations exhibiting varying degrees of progress with cleanup actions, community participation, and stakeholder interest. The team wanted to interview a variety of stakeholders to achieve a holistic understanding of the effectiveness of dialogue and communication throughout the cleanup process. The initial installations selected are shown on the map below.





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Key Observations and Feedback

A total of six (6) installation visits, four (4) RAB observations, one (1) Unified Community Advisory Board (UCAB) observation, and more than sixty (60) community and stakeholder interviews were conducted by the ECCO Initiative team between March and May 2023. The installation visits were well received by nearly all participants and the ECCO Initiative effort is generally viewed as a positive step toward strengthening relationships with communities. Structured interviews were conducted with RAB members, community residents, installation personnel, environmental regulators, and other stakeholders. The responses and feedback shared with the ECCO Initiative team during interviews provided perspective on the successes and challenges of communications between DoD and communities. The information obtained from these interviews is already informing the tools and training that installation personnel can implement to sustain communication and outreach with the public.

Three key focus areas for enhancing dialogue and communication emerged from the RAB observations and community and stakeholder interviews. These include consistent and frequent communication, educational tools and training for community members and installation personnel, and adjustments to the meeting format for RAB or other community meetings to increase opportunities for dialogue with community members.

Consistent and Frequent Communication

- Community members and stakeholders are receptive to consistent and frequent communication and tend to notice when efforts to engage are made.
- Consistent communication and information sharing throughout the cleanup process helps facilitate productive dialogue and strengthen relationships with communities and stakeholders.
- DoD personnel who collaborate frequently with community members through RABs and other outreach opportunities have stronger connections and greater trust from community members and stakeholders.
- Communication is most effective when DoD personnel consider the demographics and interests of the communities in which they are serving and how the community members and stakeholders prefer to receive information.
- A combination of web, print, and social media ensures information reaches more people plus sends a positive signal that information is being shared broadly with the community.
- RABs and other community meetings could be more effective if community members are able to provide installation personnel with input on the topics they want to hear about in advance of these meetings.
- Information presented to the community would be more easily understood if plain language was used instead of jargon and complex terminology.
- Participation from community members and presenters might increase at RABs and other community meetings if in-person and hybrid options are available.
- Additional opportunities where DoD personnel can be more involved with communities outside of RABs and normal business hours include community health fairs, school events, neighborhood meetings, church gatherings, and civic organization meetings.



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Educational Tools and Training

- An information tool describing the phases and timing of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) could provide simplified information about the process and clarify how and why DoD cleanup actions might span multiple years.
- An information tool describing the Technical Assistance for Public Participation (TAPP) Program and simplifying the application process for TAPP would raise awareness of this program and expand community access to this resource.
- Impacts to human health remain a top concern of community members affected by cleanup. Qualified health professionals or subject matter experts should be available to educate the public, answer questions, and address concerns about impacts to human-health during RAB and community meetings.
- Easier access to DoD reports and information helps community members and stakeholders understand progress with the cleanup process.
- DoD personnel expressed that risk communication training is important to their roles as program managers and are interested in refresher training targeted at communication best practices for reaching out to and engaging with stakeholders, understanding community demographics and culture, and “how to” examples and information for hosting effective meetings and other outreach events.

Meeting Format and Participation

- Open house format meetings versus town hall or panel discussion meetings create a more welcoming environment for community members, allow presenters and subject matter experts to be more engaged in dialogue with individual community members, and provide an array of information stations around the meeting room. Members of the public can elect to visit the information stations that interest them, and they can come and go at any time during the meeting. The open house format facilitates one-on-one conversations, crosstalk, and meaningful dialogue.
- Installation personnel should consider retaining support personnel to facilitate RAB meetings or assist with Open House planning and execution. Support personnel could also assist with updating Community Involvement Plans and planning other communication and outreach activities.

Next Steps

The ECCO Initiative team is in the process of planning additional installation visits to Army, Navy, and Air Force installations and aims to complete these engagements by the end of October 2023. The purpose of the next set of visits is to determine if there is additional communication-related feedback and information that differs from the initial findings. Actions are in progress to address items highlighted in the key observations and feedback section above and include:

- Developing an online and print version of a CERCLA brochure to describe how DoD follows this process.
- Examining the TAPP process and streamlining the application so TAPP can be more widely used and implemented.
- Publishing an online community questionnaire so that all community and RAB members have an opportunity to voluntarily provide feedback if they are not part of the in-person interview process.
- Developing communication templates so that frequent communication about local cleanup efforts can be routinely published on installation websites.
- Determining the best content and delivery method for augmented risk communication training for installation personnel.
- Refining the navigation and reducing the technical content currently on the DoD PFAS website to enhance a user’s experience with the site.



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DoD ECCO Initiative Plan



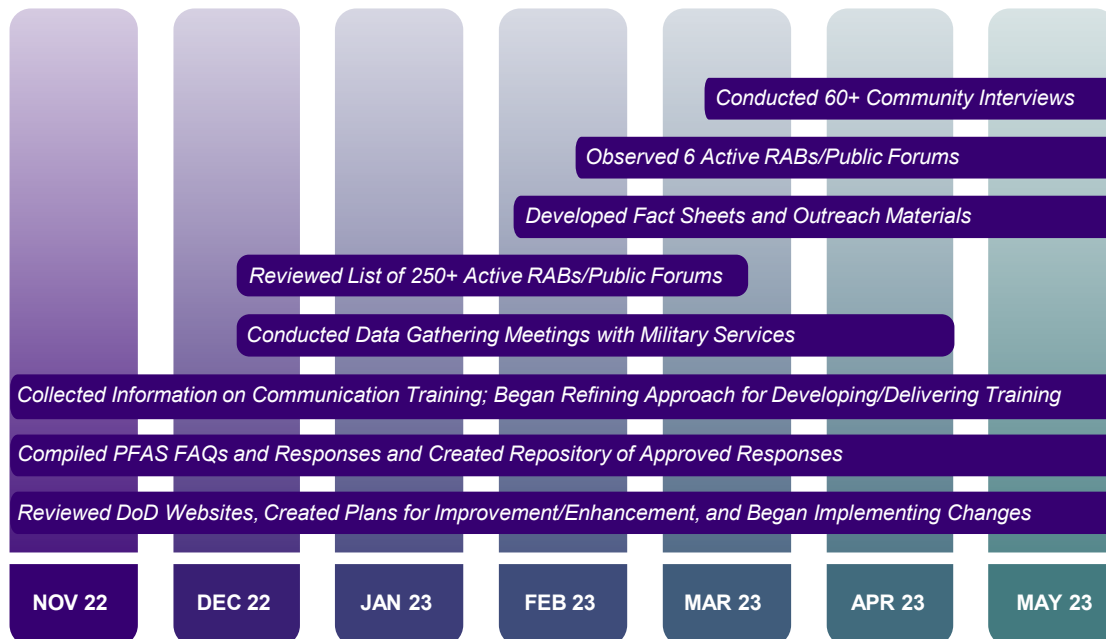
DoD ECCO Initiative Plan

The Department of Defense (DoD) launched its Environmental Cleanup Communication & Outreach (ECCO) Initiative in September of 2022. The ECCO Initiative is in its first year. Phase 1 of this action plan illustrates activities that have taken place while Phase 2 illustrates intended, upcoming actions. This initiative is focused on enhancing communication with communities surrounding former and current DoD installations. It includes hands-on, in-person engagements at installations; Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) observations; community and stakeholder interviews; communication product development with a focus on providing transparent, consistent, and clear communication regarding environmental cleanup efforts; enhanced risk communication training; and a website redesign project for the DoD PFAS website (www.defense.gov/PFAS).

Phase 1 (November 2022 – May 2023)

- Performed collaboration and data gathering meetings with the military departments.
- Reviewed list of all DoD RABs and public forums, collected feedback and recommendations from military Services, and selected six (6) installations to observe.
- Completed six (6) installation visits, four (4) RAB observations, one (1) Unified Community Advisory Board (UCAB) observation, and more than sixty (60) community and stakeholder interviews since mid-March 2023.
- Engaged personally with members of the RABs, communities, and other agency stakeholders by going directly into communities impacted by DoD cleanups to gain perspective on how communication is currently working.
- Collected information on existing communication training and began refining an approach for developing and delivering complementary training.
- Began the DoD PFAS website redesign project.

Phase 1 Timeline





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DoD ECCO Initiative Plan



Phase 2 (June 2023 – December 2023)

- Execute additional installation visits by the end of October 2023.
- Publish the online community questionnaire so that all community and RAB members have an opportunity to voluntarily provide feedback about cleanup communications.
- Publish the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) brochure.
- Publish instructions and supporting products for the Technical Assistance for Public Participation (TAPP) application and program.
- Begin developing tools and templates for installation personnel.
- Begin developing training modules for installation personnel.
- Continue the redesign of the DoD PFAS website.

Phase 2 Timeline



We appreciate the interest from community and RAB members to date. We look forward to strengthening relationships with communities through ongoing dialogue, communication, and outreach activities as we move through Phase 2 of this initiative and into future activities related to the ECCO Initiative.