



Former Wurtsmith AFB Restoration Advisory Board

26 April 2021 Co-Chair Meeting

Final Summary

Introduction

The co-chairs of the Former Wurtsmith AFB Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) met on Monday, 26 April 2021 from 0900-0950 EDT. Attendees included:

- Dr. Catharine Varley, Air Force co-chair
- Mark Henry, community co-chair
- Tim Sueltenfuss, facilitator

Discussion

Dr. Varley apologized for not circling back to Cathy Wusterbarth, community RAB member, at the conclusion of the 21 April 2021 RAB meeting. Dr. Varley intended to ask Ms. Wusterbarth to continue the comment she began in the "RAB Members'/Stakeholders' Update" agenda topic. She apologized that she failed to do so.

Mr. Henry noted many people are upset about how things went at the RAB meeting. He was inundated for a couple of hours after RAB meeting ended and throughout the following days.

FT-02

Mr. Henry remarked that, during the 21 April RAB meeting, Dr. Varley referred briefly to demolition of a concrete pad and removal of an underground storage tank at FT02. He asked if any provision had been made to place an impermeable layer over this area.

Dr. Varley noted the purpose of this effort is to construct trenches to allow the situ anaerobic biodegradation (IAB) amendment to be gravity fed into the subsurface per the 2016 Record of Decision. Mr. Henry noted the Air Force has never explained to RAB members its plan for this action. He stated none of the several attempts the Air Force has made to remediate this Fire Training Area, none of which have been entirely successful.

Dr. Varley stated a burn pit was constructed in 1982. Polyethylene sheeting was installed underneath the concrete. Removal of the concrete pad is occurring to allow in-situ treatment of hydrocarbons under the pad. Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) staff members have commented on the Remedial Action Work Plan (RAWP) and the RAWP addendum. At present, the Air Force has no data about the presence of Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS) below the concrete pad. Dr. Varley stated the Air Force knows the concrete was contaminated with PFAS so it will be disposed of properly off-site.

Dr. Varley noted PFAS sampling in soil at FT02 is included within the PFAS Remedial Investigation (RI). The Air Force must first determine the extent and depth of contamination to be able to remove any source. She remarked that, if PFAS contamination exists in the soil under the concrete pad, the existing FT02 monitoring well network would identify increases in PFAS detections. The Air Force could then schedule more frequent granular-activated carbon filter change-outs.



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Mr. Henry shared his view. FT02 was used heavily for fire training from 1970 to 1980 with no concrete pad in place. The Air Force then put polyethylene and concrete almost, but not exactly, on top of this area. He shared his view that the soil underneath the concrete pad is in practically the same condition as when the concrete was poured (i.e., saturated by PFAS). Mr. Henry stated the Air Force drilled approximately eight soil vapor extraction holes through the pad. Michigan EGLE found soil outside the pad that was contaminated by PFAS at source area strength. Mr. Henry stated the state environmental agency reported this to the Air Force in 2009 or 2010.

Mr. Henry remarked that, based on this history, he gets excited when he hears that the Air Force intends to remove the concrete pad without immediately digging and hauling the contaminated soil. Dr. Varley noted the RI contractor should be able to sample this area as soon as the concrete pad is removed. If necessary, the Air Force could then conduct a rapid response action to remove soil.

Communication with Air Force Contractors

Mr. Henry noted Dr. Varley sent an email prior to the 21 April RAB meeting, in which she asked all stakeholders to speak with her rather than with any field staff or contractors. Dr. Varley explained that Mr. Henry had spoken to a forklift operator, who expressed concern that unexpected visitors could cause mistakes. Mr. Henry emphasized that there was no danger and that he had even knocked on the door to notify staff of his presence. He expressed his surprise that this was communicated as a concern.

Providing Data to YMCA Camp and Other Stakeholders

Mr. Henry noted the Air Force had previously committed to providing data to the YMCA camp and to several professors. He asked if this had occurred. Dr. Varley stated she did so some time ago shortly after speaking with Ryan Mertz of the YMCA camp.

Follow-Up to 21 April 2021 RAB Meeting

Mr. Henry reiterated the frustration he has heard from RAB members and public participants following the 21 April 2021 RAB meeting.

Technical Information

Mr. Henry stated most RAB meeting participants found the "Conceptual Site Model (CSM) Update" agenda topic to be overly technical. It was like spending two hours in a dentist's chair. Dr. Varley apologized and noted her intent was to provide tools to the RAB members. Mr. Henry said that he appreciated the update, but people without a technical background were bored to tears.

SUGGESTED CHANGE TO UPCOMING RAB MEETINGS: Mr. Henry suggested that RAB meetings include layman's level descriptions. If a subset of RAB members is interested in hearing more detailed information, this should be provided in a separate technical meeting.



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End Time

Mr. Henry stated that ending the 21 April 2021 RAB meeting at 8:00 p.m. EDT without permitting everyone who had questions or comments to speak was a disservice to the RAB. He took this personally.

SUGGESTED CHANGE TO UPCOMING RAB MEETINGS: Mr. Henry suggested future RAB meetings should be open-ended and not have hard stop times. If the meeting runs late, it should be allowed to continue.

Mr. Henry noted he had suggested that the Air Force conduct a question-and-answer session immediately after the 21 April 2021 RAB meeting to allow those who had not been able to pose questions or make comments to do so. However, the Air Force did not do this, and frustrated people instead voiced their concern to their legislators.

Dr. Varley noted Air Force personnel have discussed the idea of posing the question of extending a RAB meeting to the RAB members. Mr. Henry indicated this would work fine. Dr. Varley conveyed her apologies.

Mr. Henry reiterated that having RAB participants depart the meeting dissatisfied with the dialogue and without another scheduled meeting has caused problems. Dr. Varley expressed her understanding and noted this would not happen again.

Notification when Items are Placed in the Administrative Record (AR)/Information Repository (IR)

Mr. Henry stated he would appreciate the Air Force notifying the RAB when items are placed in the IR. Dr. Varley stated she can notify RAB members when she sends documents to be placed on the AR. The contractor should then place those items in the IR shortly thereafter.

Mr. Henry stated this would be helpful. He noted this project is difficult enough without having to scramble around to find information.

Letter to Senator Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)

Mr. Henry asked who in the Air Force wrote the letter responding to Senator Stabenow. Dr. Varley stated Air Force leadership authored this letter. Mr. Henry asked if Dr. Varley wrote, or contributed to, this letter. Dr. Varley noted she did not. Her focus is on ensuring there is no contractual gap which would delay remedial activities at the Former Wurtsmith AFB.

Conclusion

Mr. Henry stated he would communicate with RAB members and members of the "Need Our Water" (NOW) community advocacy organization. He had asked both groups to prepare suggested changes for future RAB meetings. Mr. Henry stated he will compile these suggestions and send them to Dr. Varley.



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Dr. Varley asked if Ms. Wusterbath had other feedback that she wanted Mr. Henry to convey. Mr. Henry stated Ms. Wusterbath's main comment was that the Air Force needs to listen to the public. Not having sufficient opportunity for public comment frustrated her significantly. He noted Ms. Wusterbath was intent on reading NOW's general comment letter for the record. Mr. Henry remarked that he understood her frustration at not being able to follow through with this plan. He noted the Air Force offered to let her speak at the end of the meeting but that never occurred.

Dr. Varley apologized and noted she intended to get back to Ms. Wusterbath's comment. She asked Mr. Henry to convey her apologies to Ms. Wusterbath. Mr. Henry offered to do so but noted many people were upset.

Dr. Varley suggested that the minutes of this meeting, and any future suggestions Mr. Henry conveys to the Air Force, should be documented for the record. The co-chairs agreed to conduct a brief telephone call soon to discuss possible changes to future RAB meetings.

Mr. Henry requested a map of the Wurtsmith AFB housing area with an "X" marked where the Mission Dr. Pump and Treat was having problems with the tree roots. [Please also indicate where the Mission Dr. system connects to the housing storm sewer.] He indicated that with this information he may be able to provide a solution to the problem. Dr. Varley indicated that she would request a map.