

Qenos - Community Consultation in Altona

The Altona Complex Neighbourhood Consultative Group (ACNCG) was established in 1989 when industry, community and the local council and the State Government were at loggerheads over land planning procedures in the area closest to the Complex. At that time there were seven individual companies that made up the Altona Complex.

The conflict among the parties was fundamental - it concerned the right of the industry to operate. The community activist position was to close the Complex down, while industry didn't have a clear position of what were reasonable demands from the community and what demands for improvements in performance were untenable.

The local council was challenged from both sides; the community activists saying it was unrepresentative and industry accusing the council of lacking expertise in assessment of the industry.

The ACNCG now has a significant symbolic as well as substantive role. It has achieved the status of a forum for regular exchange of information and perspectives but it also has a very important function as a safety-net. When there is a significant problem or a significant gain, the Complex (BASF, Dow and Qenos) companies can go to the community through this forum.

The Consultative Committee comprises three senior executive managers representing BASF, Dow and Qenos; Eight residents from the local community; two representatives from the City of Hobsons Bay, two senior Managers from the Environment Protection Authority, one representative from the Victorian Workcover Authority, and one representative from City West Water. A local Councillor chairs the Group and secretarial services are provided by the Council. Observers are encouraged to attend and very often, meetings are publicised in the local newspapers inviting interested parties to attend.

The ACNCG now meets three times a year as does the relevant companies Environmental Monitoring Teams (EMT). The EMT teams focus more on individual companies issues which include environmental stewardship, review of progress on implementation of environmental improvements plans and understanding incidents and how to correct them.

The location of the ACNCG meetings is rotated between the Complex sites with the Annual General Meeting hosted by the City of Hobsons Bay. The AGM is held on Thursday, July 19, 2007, commencing at 6.00 pm. Residents, company employees, students and community observers are welcome to attend.

The meeting agenda comprises a report by the host company followed by reports from the regulatory authorities and the Council. Specific topics are then discussed. Topics are concentrated around environmental performance and related health issues, risk aspects of the operations of the Complex, and the visual impact of the Complex in the community.

A significant point to make about membership of the committee is that the complex representatives who take the lead role are the senior line management from the plants. An interesting feature of the attendance at the committee meetings is that a number of company employees attend – particularly those from community relations and environmental health and safety.

The community representatives are well respected - not part of the more oppositional group of residents and hence seem to be valued by a wide range of community members. They are expected to know what is happening in the Complex and are regarded as opinion leaders. The council provides secretariat assistance and would most likely regard itself as central to the consultative process, mainly as mediators.

Some outcomes of the committee's work are worth mentioning.

Community complaints about environmental incidents are now channelled through the Complex wide Environmental Action hotline and reports are tabled at ACNCG meetings on the nature of complaints, the sources of the environmental problem and remedial action. The annual trend in environmental complaints is also tracked.

A newsletter "The Consultative Chronicle" is an integral part of communicating ACNCG activities to the wider community. The editorial committee comprises of four residents with the Editor an employee of Qenos. Produced three times a year, the newsletter is distributed to 12,000 homes and businesses in Altona. A further 2,000 copies are mailed to community organisations and circulated to employees of the four Complex companies.

Basically, the newsletter gives the wider group of Hobsons Bay residents invaluable feedback on environmental improvements within the Altona Complex and an understanding of the Group's activities.

A Community Awareness and Emergency Response program is well organised and a resident's advice booklet was recently updated and printed in different languages. All local schools and kindergartens are connected to the program and have dedicated phone lines to the Complex for emergency alert purposes.

The success of the ACNCG demonstrates that often the most effective change can be driven by industry acting in a voluntary capacity, in its own way and at the same time reflect community attitudes and incorporate community expectations.

A structured process for community dialogue is clearly of help in this process.

The 2007 meeting schedule for ACNCG and EMT meetings is as follows:

ACNCG Meetings:

19th April, 2007

**ACNCG at Qenos
BASF, Dow & Qenos deliver
their Annual Environmental
reports for 2006**

19th July, 2007

**ACNCG at Altona Civic Centre
Annual General Meeting**

15th November, 2007

**ACNCG
BASF
Forward Plans Outlook**

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING TEAMS Schedule:

BASF EMT

Third Thursday - 15 Feb /21 June /18 October, 2007

Dow EMT

First Wednesday – 7 March/6 June/5 September/
5 December, 2006

Qenos EMT

Second Thursday – 1 March/7 June/13 September/
13 December, 2006