



THE MEMPHIS DEPOT TENNESSEE

ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD COVER SHEET

AR File Number 271

Memphis Defense Depot Focus Group Report

Background

For the past two years, the Army Defense Depot in Memphis, Tennessee has been in the process of planning for the inevitable close of the 5.5 million square foot facility. This closure is a part of a major national cost saving effort launched by the Government Base Realignment and Closure Commission which identified the site in Memphis along with 79 others across the country for closure.

Since the threat of a cold war has been minimized due to strong diplomatic relations, the number of military personnel/soldiers has decreased as well. Thus, the support required by military bases has also declined.

However, since the Memphis Army Depot has officially closed its operations, environmental concerns and how such concerns will be addressed have become paramount issues for those living within close proximity of the facility. While the Memphis Depot Redevelopment Agency, a public-private collaborative, has worked to identify potential facility reuse options, the most pressing, unresolved issue centers around environmental clean-up.

Objectives

On Tuesday, November 25, 1997, TRUST Marketing & Communications Consortium conducted two focus groups for Frontline Communications. The groups were conducted to:

- gauge awareness about the activities underway at the Depot, particularly relating environmental concerns.
- explore/identify the most effective community-responsive communication tools or methods.
- surface names of entities, groups and/or individuals that would represent credible and respected sources of information to community-based residents and leaders.

Results from the sessions will be used to:

- establish appropriate/effective ongoing communication tools.
- anchor a comprehensive community relations strategy.

To achieve the above objectives, two (2) focus groups were conducted – one (1) group included general residents who lived within close proximity of the Defense Depot; the other group consisted of neighborhood and community leaders (e.g. school principal, political activist, Orange Mound Development Corporation president, Shelby County Government employee, etc.). Community leaders were randomly selected based on leadership roles and active involvement in the community. Residents, however, were screened based on the following:

- Must be a homeowner;
- Must be 25 years of age or older;
- Must reside in one of three (3) zip codes: 38114, 38111, or 38106

A total of twenty (20) people participated in the sessions, ten (10) in each group. An Executive Summary and detailed findings follow.

Focus group methodology is qualitative and intended to provide insight into the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of intended target audiences. It is not projectable to the population at large, but is indicative of general trends.

Executive Summary

Memphis Defense Depot

Focus Group Report

Executive Summary

The summary provides a synopsis of key issues identified by both the resident and community leader groups.

- **Participants, for the most part, consisted of long term, loyal residents and leaders of the communities around the Defense Depot.** The average length of residency was approximately twenty-six (26) years. Most residents have raised their children, remodeled and paid for their homes, mostly retired and are living their "golden years" comfortably in their homes.
- **These leaders and loyal residents have for years viewed the Defense Depot as a positive community asset.** Their memories of the Defense Depot are largely fond ones, based on the jobs and the economic impact that the facility had on the community. Their fondness is also based on the relationships that were formed and the closeness that developed among people who were pioneer residents of one of Memphis' few middle and upper-middle class African American neighborhoods.
- **The government's lethargic and ineffective response to community-based environmental concerns has eroded credibility and is destroying public confidence.** Clearly, the image of the Defense Depot has become clouded and tainted due to a lack of responsiveness to health and environmental concerns voiced by residents. This is exacerbated by the very real cancer-related deaths of friends, neighbors and loved ones. It is perceived that, the incidence of cancer-related deaths among residents in the Defense Depot area is higher than normal.
- **Limited and infrequent communication is further diminishing community confidence.** Respondents perceive a drastically reduced level of communication from the Depot within the last nine (9) months to a year. Since then, information communicated has largely been via word of mouth or the DDT-Concerned Citizens Committee led by Mrs. Doris Bradshaw. The government is not considered as being forthright and forthcoming with environmental and health-related information.
- **In the absence of information, residents are uncertain about "who" or "what" to believe.** The lack of credible information is particularly troublesome to these community residents and leaders because by and large, they are informed, well-read, well-educated people with the time, desire and ability to absorb information on issues of concern to them. Their skepticism and distrust of the federal government is exacerbated by the dearth of information or communication from the government

regarding these issues, with nothing to temper or balance the correspondence received from DDT - Concerned Citizens Committee.

- **"No news is bad news," as perceived by these groups.** Since information has not been forthcoming from the government, participants assume the government is silent because there is something to hide. Therefore, there exists very little confidence in government-sponsored studies.
- **Health and environmental surveys should be conducted by an independent third party.** Information produced by the government or governmental entities will be discounted or at least, viewed with skepticism and distrust. Thus, data generated by a third party, will be viewed as more objective and believable by community residents.
- **Ethnicity and demography are perceived to have very definite bearings on the government's inadequate response to community concerns.** The unanimous consensus of both groups is the expectation that they will not receive fair, equitable or expedient attention because the affected communities are predominantly African American. There was absolutely no deviation on this point, to the extent that there was an expressed belief that had these environmental problems occurred in a white community they would have been communicated, addressed and alleviated by now. One respondent poignantly mused that she would like to take the problem to the Sierra Club because "it's national and mostly non-black people so they would get more attention."
- **There was a great deal of ambiguity around the meaning of "environmental justice."** The definitions of "environmental justice" given were generally literal, including; "the perpetrators of environmental problems being made to right their wrongs." Community residents and leaders represented in these focus groups will not be moving out and are resolved to stay and ensure that justice is done.

Resident Group Detailed Report

Resident Group Detailed Report

Ten (10) residents participated in this focus group session. The majority of residents had lived in the area an average of thirty (30) years; only two (2) had lived in their homes less than ten years. Highlights from this session follow.

General Awareness

- When asked about environmental issues in Memphis, respondents talked about the air, soil and landfills bearing hazardous and toxic waste. After one individual, on an unaided basis, mentioned the Army Depot, the general conversation of Memphis environmental issues was turned exclusively to the depot.

"I was thinking about why the Army Depot has to add toxic waste to the whole situation."

Defense Depot

- There was a high level of awareness about the Defense Depot. All participants had some knowledge about efforts underway at the Depot. Some mentioned the recent closing of the facility while others shared their concerns about contamination of the site, the lack of communication between the government and the community and the efforts of Doris Bradshaw's Concerned Citizens Committee to hire chemists to evaluate the soil and water.

"I'm very concerned about the contamination in the landfill area - as related closely to Dunn Elementary School. We've gotten reports and heard that everything is safe, but not actually getting something from the government that can really verify the fact there is no contamination - it still leaves doubt."

"We've been in meetings in our community quite a bit about the Army Depot and Doris Bradshaw was leading those. She called in various chemists and biologists and she's saying it is contaminated. One chemist said we should not plant any food over there because of contamination. We are getting two different reports here."

- When asked about the image of the Depot, some residents referenced the past. Initially, the Depot had a positive image, based on jobs and the Depot's economic contribution to the area. Now, the image is tainted and questionable due to the closing and a general lack of responsiveness to health and environmental concerns.

"I thought it was a great thing, most of us think that way until it affects you personally."

Question: Why?

"Jobs, that's the bottom line."

"Some people expressed that more people in our community was dying of cancer than in other areas."

Communication

- In identifying specific sites for meetings, some suggested the Depot, while others believed schools, libraries and churches represented preferable meeting sites. A recommendation was also made that representatives communicate efforts at Block Club meetings in the area.

"Since we have block club meetings, is it possible to bring some of these people that would be communicating with you about the Defense Depot to the block club meetings?"

"Near where we live.." "Schools are always a good place." "Churches"

"The Army Depot" "Library"

- The most appealing time for community meetings was debated at length. One young lady felt that some meetings should be held at midday to accommodate the vast majority of the community who are older and perhaps fearful about being out at night. Others thought 6 PM or 7 PM would be an ideal time. Flexibility seems to be important.

"As far as timing was concerned it was kind of inconvenient, most people don't get off from work until 6 p.m."

"People who work 9 - 5, like 7 p.m. or 7:30 p.m."

"The majority of the people living in the area are elderly, 7 o'clock at night, they're not coming out. You've got to be flexible."

"Elderly people could come at mid-day."

- Similarly, no singular approach should be used in keeping the community updated about the status of the Depot activities. Consideration should be given to a newsletter (mentioned by several participants), flyers, TV, radio, etc. In written communication, caution must be exercised to ensure that the information is simple and easy to understand.

"Flyers." "If something could be put in plain English and direct mailed."

"News on television"

"Radio in you car"

Credible Resources

- There is a great deal of skepticism and distrust for the federal government. Consequently, the participants seemed to feel that studies conducted by an independent third party or the Health Department would have more credibility.

"I have my reservations about the government and it would have to be an independent group."

"Green Peace comes to mind"

"Memphis and Shelby County Health Department"

- Participants likewise felt that someone from the community would likely be the most credible in communicating health or environmental information.

"Somebody that lives over there, because people trust them"

"It needs to be an unbiased, non-politically aligned source."

- Most respondents believe that since they are in a minority community they will not get fair treatment and had these environmental problems occurred in a white community, they would have been addressed by now.

"Being that we are a minority neighborhood, I feel we will not get fair treatment or more expedient treatment."

"I guarantee you if this was a white neighborhood and this contamination was going on, they (the government) would be up in arms."

"If it was in a white neighborhood, it wouldn't have gone this far."

"I would take my problems to the Sierra Club because it's national and mostly non-black people so they would get more attention."

Community Leader Group Detailed Report

Community Leader Detailed Report

The (10) ten community leaders participated in this group. Included were; a school principal, teachers, block club and neighborhood association presidents, a representative from county government and a political hopeful. The following report is a summary of information garnered from this group.

General Awareness

- Health issues were the overriding response and concern identified when the group was asked to think about environmental issues in Memphis.

Defense Depot

- The majority of participants were familiar with some aspect of efforts underway at the Defense Depot.

"They (employees) vacated the premises, they are trying to figure out what to do with it. They want suggestions as to how the project is best suited. I don't know what they plan to do with it."

"There are some environmental questions; something that was stored there is politically sensitive."

- A number of issues were identified as important, including concerns about health, cancer-related deaths in the area, fear that chemicals may have seeped into the water table, reduced home values, etc.

"We asked the Center for Disease Control to do a door-to-door investigation to look into the cancer in the community."

- Participants also expressed critical concern and lack of confidence centered around the government's ability to investigate, police itself and issue credible reports.

"The bone of contention is who sanctions these people to go out and find this information. If it's the government, then it's the government reporting on the government."

When asked if that was a problem, the overwhelming response was, "yes."

"It's not a question of getting the information, it's a question of trusting the source."

- In terms of defining "environmental justice," several respondents offered the following definitions:

"Correct data on the environment from reliable sources." "People having a right to know about their environment." "The perpetrators of the environmental problems being made to right their wrongs."

Communication

- There was a general concern expressed about low attendance at the meetings. This, in part, seemed due to poor communication. Since a no one approach alone is highly successful, a number of different approaches that should be used in reaching residents. These included, conducting meetings where people live (e.g. churches, schools, community centers), distributing information in high traffic locations, utilizing broadcast media announcements and utilizing direct mail targeted to each home in the area.

"Hire an independent contractor to conduct individual residential mailing."

"People are not getting the newsletter. I don't know if it's the government's responsibility but, someone has got to be accountable for the job of communicating with residents."

"In reference to where meetings should be held: they need to go where people are, church meetings or after-school meetings. Place announcements on the radio, too."

- A participant suggested several ways to ensure greater participation, including; adjusting meeting times to particularly suit retired residents, ensure meeting consistency and format (a regular meeting at the same place at the same scheduled time). A suggestion was also made to ensure format consistency in written correspondence as well. With this type of consistency, residents can become more familiar, better plan to get involved and ultimately begin to expect and rely on the information.

"Perhaps the message could be an issue. One of the issues probably is a consistent place where people can get it. Do it at the same place at the same time."

Credible Resources

- Although City Councilwoman Janet Hooks and County Commissioner Cleo Kirk's names were mentioned as having participated in meetings, they were not widely accepted by the group as credible resources. The most credible resource was thought to be an independent group which would coordinate and review information and issue a report on the environment at the Depot to the community.

"Janet is very involved, Kirk is too. Ms. Hooks does attend meetings. Frankly, her ability to disseminate information is going to be limited. It would be a high priority to tell the community what's going on at the Defense Depot."

"The government should give the money to an independent source. Put the money in the hands of the community."

- Participants did however, identify organizations that they would look to, to provide information on environmental and health issues. These groups included; the Emergency Management Office (City of Memphis), the Memphis-Shelby County Health Department, the library, hospitals and the Internet.
- There was also a strong feeling that someone should be responsible for on-going communication to the community. Based on the responses, the community is more likely to listen to someone who is from the community.
- DDMT-Concerned Citizens Committee is by far the group with the greatest top-of-mind awareness. Mrs. Bradshaw's name surfaced several times. A few participants had heard about the Mid-South Peace & Justice Center, but most were unsure about the purpose of the organization.
- The group overwhelmingly endorsed the notion that demographics (predominantly African-American population) has had a tremendous affect on how this issue has been handled by the government.

"I think if they were white people in the area it wouldn't take this long to do nothing. If they see a problem, they will fix the problem."

Recommendations

Recommendations to the Memphis Defense Depot

- **Design informative, appealing (non-governmental looking), reader-friendly newsletter similar to the Depot Conversion News.** This newsletter could be developed in alternate-monthly issues (Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, etc.) and distributed via direct mail or marriage mail covering designated zip codes of surrounding areas (38114, 38106, 38111).
- **Identify and hire an African-American Community Relations Manager, ideally someone with community ties and is reasonably familiar with the people and the issues.** This person would become the persona and the conscience of the depot/government, helping to assure residents that there is someone on the case and working in their best interest. Their attendance at community and block club meetings is critical.
- **Identify and secure the services of a local PR/marketing firm to assist Community Relations Manager and implement media relations; design/layout functions, meeting coordination, activities, newsletter production and other efforts as required.**
- **Establish and promote a hotline number to which residents can call anytime and get updated about the status of depot activities, meetings, resource information sources/people, etc.** This number can be promoted in the newsletter, on posters in area schools, churches, community centers, barber and beauty shops, retail establishments, radio and TV public service announcements, etc.
- **Establish a regular meeting day (i.e. every second Saturday) at a regular time and preferably at the depot, since it is more centrally located.** Meeting at the depot itself also promotes a more cooperative, less adversarial rapport. Other meetings may be scheduled, as needed, around the regular meeting time at other sites.
- **Establish and/or promote the existence of an independent community council to review and assess information on environmental and health issues on behalf of the community.** It is recommended that Doris Bradshaw be a member of this group. This council can serve as an information resource seeking pertinent information from the Health Department, Emergency Management Office (City of Memphis) and the Internet. Space at the depot could be provided from which the council could work.

Attachments

- **Resident & Leader Participants**
- **Discussion Guide**
- **Focus Group Screening Document**

Resident Participants - 6:00 p.m. Session

Melvin Brooks
Andre Dean
Brenda Dotson
Gwendolyn Gholston
Doris Hall
Gloria Hudson
Janie Lewis
Matthew Nichols, Jr.
Ulysses Truitt
Maurice Young

**Community Leader Participants - 8:00 p.m.
Session**

Eugene Brayon
Elaine Campbell
Kevin Clay
Troy Gresham
Ernie Gunn
Eddie Haynes
Joyce Kelly
Lucille Littlejohn
Mayme Tuggle
Hattie Wooten

Discussion Guide

Good evening, I'm Beverly Robertson and I will be facilitating the focus group this evening. How many of you have participated in focus groups before?

A focus group is simply a way for a company to solicit feedback and input regarding a particular product or service.

In a focus group, there are no right or wrong answers. Everyone's opinion is valued. If you feel differently from your neighbor please feel free to express it.

This session is also being taped because there is no way I can write as fast as you will be speaking. You, nor your comments, will appear on TV or in the paper. This information is not for public distribution.

For Residents:

Now before we start, I'd like for you to give us your name and tell me how long you've lived in the community.

For Community Leaders:

Now before we start, I'd like for you to give us your name and tell us something about you that no one else knows.

General

1. When you think of environmental issues in Memphis, what comes to your mind?
2. How knowledgeable are you of these issues? What is most important to you regarding that particular issue?

Defense Depot

3. How familiar are you with the Defense Depot or the Army Depot?

4. What is your image of the Depot?
5. How aware are you of the environmental conditions at the Depot?
6. What concerns you most about those conditions?
7. Are you aware of any efforts currently underway to address environmental concerns at the Depot?
8. How aware are you of the term, "environmental justice"? What does it mean to you?
9. Is "environmental justice" relevant to the work at the Depot? If so, how?
10. What Groups within Memphis are actively involved in "environmental justice"?

Communication

11. How would you like to be kept informed about the environmental restoration program at the Depot?
12. Where would you most likely go to get information about the Depot program?
13. Should you have a concern about environmental or health issues, who would you go to get information?

Credible Resources

14. In your opinion, who or what group is the most credible source of information on health and environmental issues - in general and specifically as it relates to the Depot?

15. How aware are you of the following groups:

- The Sierra Club
- The Memphis Greens
- Mid-South Peace and Justice Center
- The DDMT - Concerned Citizens Committee
- The Tennessee Environmental Council
- The Ground Water Institute
- The Committee To Improve Our Environment

November 25, 1997

Circle one:

6:00 PM

8:00 PM

SCREENER for Memphis Depot Community Leader FG

Respondent Name: _____

Address: _____

City, ST Zip: _____

Ph (Day): _____

Ph (Evening): _____

Hello, my name is _____, from Market Development Associates, a full service market research firm. My firm is working with Trust Marketing and The Memphis Depot in the development of a paid research project about the future use of the Depot.

Today I am seeking community leaders' participation in a paid research study scheduled for Tuesday, November 25. We are not selling anything. May I ask you a few questions?

1. What age category best describes your age?

18-24 _____ (Thank and Terminate)

25-30 _____

31-45 _____

46-55 _____

56-65 _____

65+ _____

2. Please rate on a scale of 1-4 with (1 being unfamiliar and 4 being highly aware) How familiar are you with the areas and residents around the Memphis Depot?

1 _____ (Thank and Terminate)

2 _____ (Thank and Terminate)

3 _____

4 _____

3. Please rate on a scale of 1-4 with (1 being not active and 4 being highly active) How active of an interest you take part in the area and with the resident/community around the Memphis Depot?

1 _____ (Thank and Terminate)

2 _____ (Thank and Terminate)

3 _____

4 _____

4. Do you currently live in one of the following Zip Codes?

38114 []

38111 []

39106 []

Other _____ (Which one do you live in?)

We will be conducting a Focus Group on November 25th at (Time - CIRCLE ONE) The purpose of this discussion group is to learn what opinions you have about the future of your area. We would like to invite you to participate. There will be no sales pitch, and you will receive \$50.00 for your participation. The group discussion will last about an hour and a half and light dinner will be served in the 8:00 PM group.

We will send you a letter and a map to confirm your appointment. Somebody will call you before the group as a reminder. Thank you.

Indicate sex (Do not Ask)

_____ Male

_____ Female

FINAL PAGE

ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

FINAL PAGE

FINAL PAGE

ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

FINAL PAGE