



## **Conducting Initial Site Assessments A Summary Guide**

The main functions of the Blacksmith Initial Site Assessment are:

- to determine if there is a real risk to human health at a polluted site
- to understand in broad terms the extent of the pollution and the pathways, and the history of the site
- to determine the key stakeholders including ownership history, and possibly identify the local champion who might be responsible for implementation of clean-up activities.

Some good guidelines for the work are as follows:

### **Before the Visit:**

Use your network and contacts with government and NGOs to talk to local stakeholders, particularly from the local environmental agency, or from a respectable local NGO.

Arrange for a site tour with one of these people, and make appointments to visit others during the visit. It is not usually necessary to set up meetings with all stakeholders prior to the visit, as other people often can be accessed while at the site.

Do internet/literature searches of all reports, especially technical reports related to the site. Make pdf copies of these, and upload them to the website. Especially, look for credible test results of pollutants in those reports. Compare these results against the standards list to get an idea as to whether the site qualifies as a risk.

You will not need more than one day on-site, and spending additional days to wait for a particular stakeholder meeting is probably counterproductive. Experience shows that if the sites are close and have the same set of stakeholders, you can often assess several sites in one day.

### **During the Visit:**

Make a tour of the site as soon as possible, and explore the extent of the problem so you understand it well. During the tour, take notes and photos extensively. Take and record the site's GPS coordinates.

Ask your tour guide for reports and data tests all the time, so that you can complete the Risk Assessment spreadsheet. As you have other meetings with other stakeholders,



remember to ask and make copies of all other reports as they are shown to you. It is ALWAYS better to find a way to make a copy of a report at the time, than rely on someone copying it later, or sending it via email, etc.

If there are no test results, you will need to take some appropriate samples, and send them off for testing ourselves. Three to six samples should be enough. We do not intend to survey the full extent of the pollution at this stage, just to understand if there is a risk.

There are a few vital pieces of data you always want to get. These are:

- Test results of levels of pollutant. Look for credible test results for the pollutant, and review these against the standards. If at least one result is significantly above standards, you should continue the site assessment in as detailed a manner as time will allow. If the test results do not show levels that indicate a risk, you can cut short the review.
- Population affected. This could be an estimate of neighborhood numbers, for soil pollution, numbers drinking the water, for water pollution, etc. This number will only be a rough estimate at this stage, and some certainty is needed only for the order of magnitude.
- Pathway for contamination. You should be clear as to how the population is ingesting the toxin.

A sketch of the site, or a map (pdf'd and uploaded), as well as a simple description of the site is also needed. Photos as well. These should be sufficient so that someone distant can quickly understand the extent of the problem. All these should be uploaded to the website.

Other information is useful, but not vital. Responsible parties information can be collected anecdotally, from conversations with stakeholders. Detailing the stakeholders contact information is also important. Outlining the next course of action can also be very valuable. Detailing current plans to mitigate the problem, and existing community action is also invaluable.

### **After the Visit**

The same night, as much information as possible should be uploaded to the website. The online system will take not only text information, but also pdf's and photos from your computer.



We recommend that you complete the ISA information online the same day as the visit. Data and informational tidbits from the day will not be lost if it is done with the site fresh in your mind. Remember, you will likely be looking at another site the next day, and it is very easy to confuse information.

If you need to wait on test results before completing the Risk Assessment worksheet, you must record that on the website, for Blacksmith to track. Please follow the sampling protocols regarding labeling and packaging of samples for lab testing.

### **Questions.**

Check with your regional coordinator with immediate questions and clarifications, even while on site. They will refer issues to other Blacksmith technical staff if needed.