

CASE HISTORY

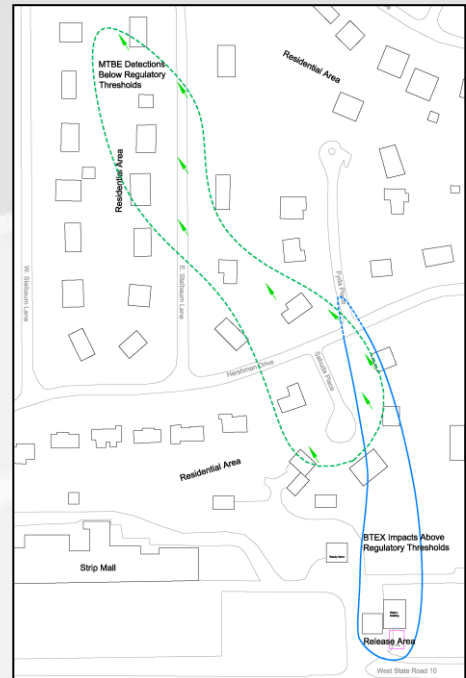
Public Relations with a Community Affected by Petroleum Constituents in Drinking Water Wells - Wheatfield, Indiana

Challenge:

MUNDELL was contracted to characterize the nature and extent of petroleum impacts from a gasoline release at a retail fuel station west of Wheatfield, Indiana. The surrounding community of small businesses, residences, and schools all depended on private wells for drinking water, prompting a Indiana Department of Environmental Management designation as a “high priority” site. Investigation results indicated that a benzene groundwater plume exceeding relevant IDEM screening levels had traveled off-site and impacted residential drinking water wells. A second area of dissolved methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE), below IDEM screening levels, was identified farther downgradient in groundwater and in a cluster of residential wells. News of the impacts spread uncertainty throughout the community and prompted a third party law suit. In this emotionally charged environment, MUNDELL was entrusted to conduct routine drinking water and indoor air monitoring and provide public relations throughout the investigation and remediation.

Action:

MUNDELL personnel developed a public outreach strategy combining personal interactions and remote outreach via mail and social media. MUNDELL partnered with IDEM to conduct a public meeting to educate and inform members of the community on risks associated with the release and the proposed trajectory of investigation and remediation. Following each drinking water sampling event, MUNDELL mailed individualized letters providing and interpreting analytical results. MUNDELL made home visits and fielded phone calls with concerned residents, taking to time provide explanations in accessible terminology. As the project progressed to the remedial phase, MUNDELL again partnered with IDEM to conduct a Public Availability Session to educate the community on the implementation of soil vapor extraction system and remedial injections. Finally, to provide long-term communication continuity, MUNDELL web development personnel created a project blog including project history, updates and alerts, and a portal to contact key project personnel directly with questions and concerns.



Results:

MUNDELL personnel cultivated a collaborative relationship with IDEM officials and established rapport with the affected community. MUNDELL created audience appropriate documents to inform school and county officials and the greater community of potential health risks, investigation events, and remedial progress. As on-site work progresses through the cleanup phase, the multifaceted communication efforts continue to provide cost effective, timely dissemination of information regarding remedial progress.