Effective Communication Contributes to Project Success
Leonard Greenberger, Potomac Communications Group

Background
Successful soil remediation depends on many factors that project managers know well: accurate assessments as to the extent and nature of contamination; the right choice and proper implementation of remediation technologies; and deft negotiation of regulatory requirements and review. One equally important factor that often receives too little attention is stakeholder communication.

Effective communication strategies and tactics can help to avoid project delays and cost overruns related to stakeholder concerns and opposition, and inoculate owners and others against frivolous litigation. Remediation projects also offer opportunities to bolster the brands and images of engaged parties, including owners, engineering and environmental contractors – and even the regulatory agencies that oversee them.

Teaching Points
During this session, participants will learn about best practices as identified by academic experts in the field and real-world experience. These will include:

• using language that multiple audiences can understand;
• following risk communication principles that are crucial when communicating in "high-concern, low-trust" situation; and
• the importance of engaging third parties to bolster credibility.

Let me offer one example to illustrate the point. At a public meeting that my firm helped to facilitate in 2014, a very angry and concerned resident threatened to protest in the streets, petition elected officials and file suit to stop an MGP remediation project in Rhode Island because he was convinced that “something he smelled while walking near the site” had killed his dog. We managed to calm him down by promising to investigate and follow up. We confirmed that he was smelling harmless mercaptan emanating from a nearby natural gas regulator unrelated to any MGP contaminants. At the next public meeting, we set up individual stations with experts in several different disciplines – including one manned by an independent export on the transmission and distribution of natural gas specifically for this resident. By the time he left the meeting, he was smiling and shaking hands with the client’s representatives. Communications best practices had defused a potentially costly situation.

Summary
Participants will come away with a better understanding of the importance of effective communication in ensuring project success and with new skills that will them to be better communicators both within their organizations and with outside stakeholder groups.

Leonard Greenberger
Leonard S. Greenberger is the author of What To Say When Things Get Tough (McGraw-Hill, 2013), a how-to book on business communications strategies for winning people over when they’re angry, worried and suspicious about remediation and other NIMBY projects. As a partner at Potomac Communications Group (PCG), which he joined in 1992, Leonard has worked with many clients to help them communicate effectively about complex remediation projects. Prior to joining PCG, he served as an editor for a national trade publication representing the energy industry. He holds a master’s degree in journalism from Northwestern University and a bachelor’s degree in communications from the University of Michigan. Leonard lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife and two children.