

Timeline: The Founding of F-CHEC and Its Conduct of a MTA-Funded Research Project

The Fernald Community Health Effects Committee (F-CHEC) is a non-profit, grassroots community organization incorporated in the State of Ohio in April, 2002. The purpose of F-CHEC is to bring awareness and better understanding to the surrounding community and health professionals of the potential health impacts of living near the Fernald Feed Material Production Center (FMPC), now called the Fernald Environmental Management Project (FEMP).

The concept of the F-CHEC was formed in July 2001 when the Fernald Health Effects Subcommittee (FHES), sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), was disbanded. FHES community members believed that numerous health-related issues still needed to be addressed. They thought that the possible health effects associated with exposure to radioactive and toxic chemicals released from the former Department of Energy (DOE) uranium processing and nuclear weapons production plant in southwestern Ohio required additional investigation.

The following timeline chronicles the formation of F-CHEC and the conduct of its first research project funded by the Citizens' Monitoring and Technical Assessment (MTA) Fund. For more information about the MTA Fund, go to <http://www.mtafund.org>.

July 2001

Fernald area citizens and former members of the CDC sponsored Fernald Health Effects Subcommittee decide to address the potential health effects associated with living near the former FMPC plant. Interested residents and workers begin to meet regularly.

September 2001

Fernald area citizens contact researchers at the University of Cincinnati (UC) College of Medicine for assistance in conducting health related research. An environmental epidemiologist in the Department of Environmental Health expressed interest in partnership with the community group on a research project.

October 2001

The community group begins the process of applying for non-profit status.

The following issues are decided:

1. Name: Fernald Community Health Effects Committee, Inc.
2. Acronym: F-CHEC
3. Slogan: Gathering the Pieces for Communicating Health Awareness
4. Membership: Volunteers
5. Dues: None
6. Meetings: Monthly

November 2001

F-CHEC founding members and the University Environmental Health Foundation researcher (UEHF) identify the Citizens Monitoring & Technical Assessment Fund (MTA) as a potential source for funding a research project. MTA fund requires applicant to be a 501(c)3 with financial management and grant administration capabilities.

F-CHEC begins the process of incorporation in the State of Ohio.

F-CHEC identifies a lawyer willing to assist with the incorporation.

The following issues are decided:

1. organizational by-laws;
2. founding officers;
3. trustees;
4. purpose; and
5. planned activities.

February 2002

F-CHEC submits a Letter of Intent for the MTA grant. To satisfy the requirement for demonstrated fiscal management experience, F-CHEC seeks an organization to serve as the fiscal agent.

F-CHEC holds monthly meetings and networks with other organizations making presentations at group meetings, including township trustees' and the Fernald Citizens Advisory Board (FCAB).

F-CHEC monthly meetings are announced in community newspapers and newsletters.

Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) includes F-CHEC in their Ohio Federal Facility Annual Report.

March 2002

The MTA Fund contacts F-CHEC, accepting the Letter of Intent.

F-CHEC proposed to conduct the following:

1. Design and conduct a community survey addressing the use and maintenance of wells and cisterns within the five-mile exposure domain of the Fernald plant.
2. Identify and organize sources of water quality data for the Fernald area.

April 2002

F-CHEC receives notice of incorporation status in the State of Ohio and files to become recognized as a 501(c)3 organization.

May 2002

F-CHEC submits an application with UEHF consultant to the MTA Fund: 501(c)3 status still pending.

August 2002

F-CHEC receives a \$49,795 grant from the Citizens' Monitoring and Technical Assessment Fund to conduct the project called "Fernald Area Cisterns and Wells: What is Known and What Does the Public Need to Know?" Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from UC is required before starting the project.

MTA approves F-CHEC using a licensed CPA as the fiscal agent.

September-December 2002

F-CHEC and UEHF consultant define the scope of work for both parties.

F-CHEC and UEHF collaboration is hereinafter referred to as the Research team.

F-CHEC develops grant management procedures, including documentation of in-kind contributions, such as volunteer time.

The Research Team modifies the Cistern Use and Maintenance Questionnaire conducted among Fernald Medical Monitoring Program (FMMP) participants living within two miles of the Fernald facility. This modified survey will be distributed to area residents. Eligibility criteria include the following:

1. residence within the five-mile exposure domain;
2. presence of a cistern on the property; and
3. not a participant of the FMMP.

January-May 2003

The Research Team files an application with the UC IRB for permission to conduct cistern survey. A signed consent form is not required. Each page of the survey includes the following language: "Please Note: Completion of the self-administered questionnaire constitutes informed consent." IRB approval is obtained.

F-CHEC members attend a one-day Survey Training Program conducted by UEHF researchers. The training includes the following topics:

1. Purpose & Scope of the Survey Project
2. Protecting Confidentiality
3. Getting Started
4. Interviewing
5. Questionnaire Overview
6. Processing Procedures
7. Commonly Asked Questions
8. Next Steps

The Research Team prepares items to be included in the survey packet:

1. cover letter that introduces F-CHEC and explains the purpose of the survey and details the procedures for returning completed questionnaires;
2. copy of the questionnaire;
3. self-addressed, stamped envelope;
4. map of the five-mile exposure domain

January-May 2003 (continued)

The Research Team develops a list of potential contacts and records contacts made to publicize and distribute the cistern surveys.

The Research Team plans procedures for publicizing the survey project, documenting outreach contacts and distribution outlets, and distributing and collecting the surveys. To announce the survey project, an article is placed in three local newspaper and newsletter of local organizations. Two drop-off stations centrally located in the five-mile area of the exposure domain are identified for residents to pick-up a survey or drop off a completed survey.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team compile information to be included in a video about F-CHEC, Inc., including the founding of the organization, the purpose of the survey project and persons eligible to participate in the survey. The video is to be used at presentations to groups ensuring message consistency when different team members talk with community groups.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team design and print fliers about the survey project and distribute to local businesses, churches, organizations and community events.

The Fernald Citizens Advisory Board (FCAB) posts the survey appeal on their web site. (<http://www.fernald.gov>).

F-CHEC sponsors fund raising events to pay for routine expenses.

June 2003

F-CHEC members of the Research Team contact a sponsor to produce and narrate the video entitled "The History of F-CHEC": the background, purpose and scope of the survey research project are presented.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team make presentations at meetings of local organizations and drop off surveys for distribution at area gas stations, convenient stores, community centers, banks, etc. All presentations and drop-offs are recorded in the outreach log book and highlighted on a wall map in the F-CHEC office to ensure good geographic distribution of survey packets and fliers.

Presentations continue through July 15, 2005.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team respond to email and phone inquiries about the survey project, mailing survey packets upon request.

July 2003

F-CHEC members of the Research Team make a personal appearance on the program "Community Report" to publicize their organization and the research project. The video airs on the public service television station Intercommunity Cable Regulatory Commission (ICRC). The video is broadcast on radio as a public service announcement.

July 2003 (continued)

F-CHEC members of the Research Team continue to make presentations at meetings of local organizations and place surveys at designated sites for distribution.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team continue to respond to inquiries about the survey project, mailing survey packets upon request.

August-December 2003

F-CHEC members sponsor fund raising events for organizational expenses and guest speakers at F-CHEC public meetings.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team continue to make presentations at seven township trustee community meetings and thirteen local organizations leaving behind surveys and fliers for distribution. The survey and fliers continue to be placed at two centrally located drop-off stations.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team continue to respond to phone inquiries about the survey project, mailing survey packets upon request.

The Research Team receives inquiries from FMMP participants wanting to participate in the cistern survey. (FMMP participants living outside the two-mile exposure domain did not participate in the FMMP cistern survey in 2001). FMMP personnel acknowledge receipt of phone calls from participants wanting to participate in the survey.

The Research Team and FMMP personnel discuss the possibility of expanding the cistern survey project to include the FMMP participants living outside the two-mile, but inside the five-mile exposure domain.

The Research Team submits a letter to the trustee of the FMMP for permission to send surveys to the FMMP participants not included in the two-mile cistern survey project. The FMMP trustee grants permission for the survey to proceed.

The Research Team revises the cistern survey for distribution to the eligible FMMP participants. A cover letter from the Research Team and the FMMP are drafted for inclusion in the mailing of the surveys. Procedures for mailing surveys and receiving completed surveys are outlined.

All contacts with FMMP participants are handled by FMMP personnel. To maintain confidentiality, the FMMP requires that the Research Team not access any personal information about FMMP participants.

January-June 2004

The Research Team develops a system for assigning a unique Identification Number (ID) to each survey. The survey packets consist of a letter of introduction, a survey and self-addressed, stamped envelope.

January-June 2004 (continued)

The Research Team works in the FMMP office preparing the survey packets for mailing by FMMP staff, a total of 727 surveys are mailed.

The FMMP staff develops procedures to copy and process completed surveys, removing all personal information before forwarding to the Research Team.

The Research Team develops a log book to record the return of completed surveys. Review procedures are created to ensure that surveys are complete, readable and logical before data entry.

The Research Team registers completed surveys by recording receipt in the log book by ID. Team members inspect each survey per the review criteria. Surveys requiring additional information or clarification are flagged for FMMP staff to conduct follow-up via phone call.

July-August 2004

The Research Team and the FMMP staff set July 15th as the final date for receipt of completed surveys.

The Research Team continues to log-in completed surveys.

The Research Team works with the statistical consultant to develop the data entry procedures for the revised cistern survey. The surveys are entered into an electronic database using Statistical Analysis System (SAS); all data entry is hand checked by a two person data error checking team. Errors are corrected and re-checked until all entries are correct.

September-December 2004

The Research Team develops and implements coding procedures for open-ended questions.

January-July 2005

The Research Team develops a work plan for the creation of a database of sources of water quality data for the Fernald area. The work plan includes the following:

1. potential sources of information;
2. creation of a DATA ABSTRACT FORM to be used to record reference information to be included in the database;
3. design of a searchable database to include all the reference materials;
4. key words for searching on-line and electronic databases

The Research Team contacts reference librarians, regulatory agency personnel, key contacts, etc. for assistance in locating documents. Documents are obtained and catalogued for inclusion in the database using the DATA ABSTRACT FORM designed by the Research Team. A UC environmental engineering student is hired to review the documents, identify the types of data presented in each document and complete the DATA ABSTRACT FORM. The Research Team enters information from the DATA ABSTRACT FORM into a Microsoft Access database.

June 2005

The Research Team decides to expand the scope of the database by creating an electronic inventory of the well logs in the five mile domain.

F-CHEC members of the Research Team begin the task of determining the location of each well to ensure that it was, in fact, in the designated domain. F-CHEC members of the Research Team access the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Water Well Logs and Drilling Reports on-line at <http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/water/water/maptechs/wellogs/app>.

August 2005

The Research Team creates a computerized database for information collected about water wells within the five-mile domain of the former Fernald Nuclear Weapons site. This area includes Crosby, Colerain, Whitewater and Harrison Townships in Hamilton County; and Ross, Morgan and Fairfield Townships in Butler County.

September –December 2005

F-CHEC members of the Research Team work towards verifying all wells, exhausting all available avenues of information. This includes visits to local libraries, visits to the Fernald Settlement trustee office, and visits to the Ohio Division of Natural Resources (ODNR) which houses the original well drilling applications and maps of the well locations.

January 2006

F-CHEC members of the Research Team again visit ODNR to obtain additional copies of Well Reports and the associated maps.

August- September 2006

The Research Team audits its databases and documentations, and critiques its written material.

F-CHEC produces a CD including the following materials:

- Results of Cistern Use and Maintenance Questionnaire;
- Database of wells within the Fernald five-mile exposure domain;
- Database of water quality reference materials pertaining to Fernald.