



Village Environmental Planning Assessment

The Village Environmental Planning Assessment

The Technical Environmental Assessment is used to educate planners more about potential environmental issues in the community to ensure that all areas are considered when planning. The Village Environmental Planning Assessments are used to further identify local environmental issues, involve the entire village in the planning process, and to rank the issues identified in order of importance to the village.

What is the Village Environmental Planning Assessment?

An *assessment* is a tool used to gather information. An assessment can be a written document or a list of interview questions. There are many ways to gather needed information. **The Village Environmental Planning Assessment** is used to gather local feedback and to identify a community’s environmental priorities. The sample assessment shown on pages 216-217 can be used to educate residents about the environmental challenges in the community and to build consensus, or agreement, within the community over environmental issues. The assessment identifies many issues that are relevant to rural communities in Alaska, but not all.

Some of the environmental issues that appear on the example assessment provided in this manual and on the ANTHC website, may not relate to your community. It is merely a template for you to follow. You will need to replace environmental issues already included in the template with environmental issues specific to your community as determined by your environmental planning team. Each community is different and will want to design their own assessment form to better reflect local issues and concerns.

Example

Village Environmental Planning Assessment

		<i>Not important</i>		<i>Very important</i>		
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe drinking water
	1	2	3	4	5	
B	1	2	3	4	5	Abandoned vehicles, boats or other Equipment left in and/or around the Village
	1	2	3	4	5	

Issues covered on sample Village Environmental Planning Assessment

- Safe drinking water
- Abandoned vehicles, boats, etc.
- Beach and/or river bank erosion
- Village dump/landfill
- Construction materials left by contractors
- Abandoned drums
- Raw sewage spills/sewage disposal
- Annual clean-up
- Indoor air pollution
- Fuel oil contaminated soils
- Air pollution outdoors
- Dead animals/fish left around village
- Trash left around village
- Contaminated subsistence foods
- Old military sites
- Hazardous or toxic materials
- Other issues

Wilfred Ashby from the Village of Noatak is concerned with the impacts of nearby mining and how it may be affecting his village and the surrounding areas used for subsistence.



Sarah Weisner identified a serious environmental concern for her village of Shungnak
“We have villages living upstream from us. They also have dog teams and these dogs do waste along the riverbanks. When the river comes up and washes the beach, everything goes down river and we consume the water, fish, and animals and everything that comes with it. We are also a village upstream from other villages.”

Explanation of Village Environmental Planning Assessment issues

A brief explanation of each issue on the sample Village Environmental Planning Assessment on pages 216-217 is provided below. It may be useful to use these or similar explanations and pictures when conducting your Village Environmental Planning Assessment.

In many Alaska villages, English is not the primary language spoken and many people, especially elders may have a difficult time understanding some of the terms used in your assessment. In many Alaska Native languages, there is no word for “pollution” or “hazardous waste”. Be prepared to use visuals with each issue identified on your final assessment and consider bringing along a translator who is fluent in the language when conducting the assessments door-to-door.

Safe drinking water

Safe drinking water is water that is safe from disease and contaminants. Untreated or improperly treated water can make people sick, especially children and elders.



Abandoned vehicles, boats or other equipment left in and/or around the village

Materials such as deserted cars, boats, old generators, engines, and snowmobiles left around the village are ugly and contain hazardous materials such as antifreeze and lead-acid batteries. These materials can pollute the environment and are dangerous to children who often play with them.

Beach and/or river bank erosion

Erosion of the river bank or beach means that soil or sand at the river, lake or ocean-side is being washed away by weather. Erosion can prevent fish from living and reproducing. Erosion also threatens housing, roads and old landfills.



Photo Courtesy Mike Brubaker



Village dump/landfill

Many landfills in rural areas are uncontrolled and present public health problems. Some landfills contain hazardous materials that can get into the drinking water. Diseases from the landfill can be transported into the village by both humans and animals if not managed properly.

Construction materials that are left behind by contractors

Contractors often leave behind materials such as paints, thinners, and plywood that are not used up completely. Some of these materials may be hazardous.



Abandoned drums in and/or around the village

A 55-gallon abandoned drum may contain hazardous materials that eventually leak into the ground and contaminate the water. Empty drums are ugly and can potentially be harmful to children.

Raw sewage spills in the community and improper sewage disposal at the lagoon

In honey bucket communities, sewage spills can lead to the spread of infectious diseases.



Photo Courtesy EPA website
<http://water.epa.gov/type/watersheds/wastewater/basic.cfm>



Annual clean-up program

Annual clean-up programs are a way to involve the community in improving the appearance of the village.

Indoor air pollution, such as cigarette/wood stove smoke

Cigarette smoke and wood stove smoke are sources of indoor air pollution and can be hazardous to your health.



Photo Courtesy Algaaciq Tribal Government



Fuel oil contaminated soils in or around the village

Fuel from snow machines, ATVs, cars, fuel tanks and the power plant generator, is a potential source of pollution. Small amounts of oil dripping on the ground adds up to a larger amounts over time. Oil can pollute drinking water.

Air pollution problems caused by the Village electric generator, open burning at the dump, vehicles or smoke from burn barrels in the village

The air that comes out of generators, vehicles, and burn barrels may contain chemicals that are toxic, or poisonous to your body. Some materials are known to cause cancer.



Dead animals and dead fish left in or around the village

Dead animals and fish attract organisms that spread diseases.

Trash left in and/or around the village

Trash left around the village is ugly and can also contribute to the spread of disease.



Contaminated subsistence foods

Hazardous materials that are not properly disposed of can potentially poison the subsistence foods your community relies on and make the food unsafe to eat.



Old military sites cleanup

Many old military sites have not been cleaned up and materials remain in or near villages. Some of these materials may be hazardous. Not every village has old military sites.

Hazardous or toxic materials left in dump sites and/or other areas around the village

Hazardous or toxic materials include things such as antifreeze, lead-acid batteries, fuel oil, many household cleaners, old lead paint, paint thinners, gasoline, aerosol cans, compact fluorescent light bulbs, electronics and asbestos. These materials should not be placed in your landfill because they can potentially get into the ground and contaminate the drinking water.



<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/caer/ce/ee/earth/air/images/erthole.gif>

Environmental issues beyond village control, such as ozone depletion, polluted oceans and/or rivers

There are many issues that may affect your village that you have no control over. For example, pollution created in places far away from Alaska contributes to the depletion of the ozone layer. This increases the chances for cancer caused by the sun's radiation.

Other?

Add any other environmental issues that are specific to your community. For example, dust on the roads, polluted water upstream, environmental effects of logging, improper use/disposal of toxic household cleaning products, mining operations, leaking fuel transfer pipes, tourism, etc.

Why do you use the Village Environmental Planning Assessment?

The Village Environmental Planning Assessment is a powerful tool that can be used to build community consensus. Community-based environmental planning begins by finding out which environmental issues the community sees as the most important issues and the Village Environmental Planning Assessment is used to prioritize them. The results show a consensus, or agreement, over village environmental issues.

Benefits of doing a Village Environmental Planning Assessment

- Allows for input from each person in the community
- Increases local knowledge about environmental / health issues in the village
- Involves the community in environmental planning
- Serves as an educational tool for the community
- May help your village qualify for funding
- Shows potential funders that the entire community is involved in environmental planning.
- Helps people in the village work together

How is the Village Environmental Planning Assessment used in planning?

Step 3 discussed on page 16 - 17 of the manual describes how to use the Village Environmental Planning Assessment in the planning process.

The Village Environmental Planning Assessment should be developed with the help of your community and planning team. Use the sample assessment on pages 216-217 as a template, and add or delete issues from it based on issues identified for your village by community members and planning team members. There is also a template available in excel format at: www.anthc.org/chs/ces/hve/7-generations.cfm

The Village Environmental Planning Assessment provided in this manual can be used as a guide to help develop an assessment specific to your community's needs.



*"While environmental issues often polarize communities dealing with questions of economic development and the health of the environment, this Assessment gave the Tribe consensus about environmental issues without involving politics."
Kate Williams, Eyak, Alaska*

When do you use the Village Environmental Planning Assessment?

The Village Environmental Planning Assessment is used in step 3 of the Planning Process to help identify the environmental priorities of the community. The Village Environmental Planning Assessment needs to include all of the issue categories identified by your Environmental Planning Team.

What other information can be added to the Village Environmental Planning Assessment?

You may choose to add items to your assessment to get more information. For example: the Village Environmental Planning Assessment in this manual asks people to rank the importance of different issues. You may want to find out how satisfied people are with the community's efforts on each of the issues. One way you could find out this information is by using the format below on your assessment:

Example:

	Importance of issue					Satisfaction with the community's efforts				
	<i>Not</i>			<i>Very</i>		<i>Not</i>			<i>Very</i>	
Safe drinking water	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Abandoned vehicles, boats or other equipment left in	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

When you are developing your assessment, remember to keep the assessment simple and easy to understand. A complicated assessment is difficult to answer and may end up giving you false information. It is important to develop an assessment that can be used again in the future to monitor the environmental changes that take place in your village. If you keep the assessment the same, you will be able to see the progress your village has made over time.

Village Environmental Planning Assessment

Village of _____

There may be very serious environmental problems in our village, that could threaten the health of our community. We need your help in ranking the issues identified below.

This ***Assessment form*** is designed to obtain your input to develop our village environmental plan. Our goal is to make our community an environmentally safe place to live and raise families. Your participation in this assessment will greatly assist us in reaching this goal. This assessment will help us address serious problems with solid waste, hazardous/toxic pollutants and other environmental issues in our village. Listed below are some environmental health problems or issues that may need to be addressed.

Each environmental issue listed below should be **ranked** as to how important you believe the issue is in our village. “1” is the lowest ranking (not important), and “5” is the highest (very important).

	Not Important		Very Important			
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking Water
B	1	2	3	4	5	Abandoned vehicles, boats or other equipment left in and/or around the village
C	1	2	3	4	5	Beach and/or river bank erosion
D	1	2	3	4	5	Village dump/landfill
E	1	2	3	4	5	Construction materials left behind from contractors
F	1	2	3	4	5	Abandoned drums in and/or around the village
G	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
H	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
I	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
J	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here

	Not Important		Very Important			
K	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
L	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
M	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
N	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
O	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
P	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
Q	1	2	3	4	5	Add an issue identified by your planning team here
R	1	2	3	4	5	Other?

Please use the space below for comments or if you feel that there are other environmental health issues in our village that you feel need to be addressed.

This information is very important to our village. Thank you for taking time to complete it.

OPTIONAL. If you would like to receive a copy of your assessment along with the results of the assessment, please write your name and address below:

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

Conducting the Village Environmental Planning Assessment

Who do you give the assessment to?

Ideally, every person in your community should complete an assessment form. The information that you collect will better represent the village's concerns if more people fill out the assessment form.

What is the best way to Assessment the community?

The best way to involve the community is by going door-to-door and to wait while the forms are being filled out. You will get the most responses if you administer the assessment this way. This also allows people to ask questions in case there is confusion. The disadvantage to this method, however, is that it can take a lot of time. Other methods, such as mailings or dropping the assessment forms off at a person's house, may take less time but will also yield fewer responses. In some communities, the tribal environmental staff have administered the assessments, but it doesn't hurt to hire extra help if necessary and if you've got the resources to do that.



You may need to interview people and fill in the assessment form for them. Do not exclude people if they cannot read or understand the assessment. Each person's input is very important. The pictures and explanations of questions on pages 210-213 may be helpful. You may also want to find pictures and develop explanations for issues for your assessment that are not in this manual.

It's a good idea to get feedback on your assessment from a few people before involving the entire community. This way you can correct any problems and make improvements to your assessment form. Your co-workers or Environmental Committee members might be a good place to start.

The Native Village of Eyak has involved the community in the environmental planning process. The assessment was a list of 31 environmental issues that were to be ranked, or prioritized, by tribal members. One hundred and fifty-eight people were asked to complete the assessment.

Two tribal members were hired to conduct the assessments door-to-door. Perhaps most encouraging were the positive comments that were written on the form about the need for the village to take an active role in environmental issues. There were also 31 people who expressed an interest in serving on the Eyak Environmental Committee.

How do you fill in the Village Environmental Planning Assessment?

Each issue on the assessment form should be ranked with a number between 1 and 5 with the number 1 indicating “not important” and 5 indicating “very important.” It is necessary that a response is given for each issue; otherwise the results will not accurately show the community’s views. You will be able to control this better if you conduct the assessment door-to-door. If a person has a question about a certain issue on the form, you will be there to assist him/her.

Each person should rank the issues on the Village Environmental Planning Assessment according to how important each issue is to him/her EVERY DAY. You are not trying to determine if people think “safe drinking water” is an important issue only at a certain moment. Rather, you want to know how important they feel “safe drinking water” is all of the time.

If the person filling out the assessment form does not understand one of the statements, make sure you help him/her without giving your opinion about the statement. For example, when you explain the statement “safe drinking water” on the assessment form, don’t change the intent of the statement by the way you ask the question. Do not say, “Safe drinking water is an issue, *isn’t it?*” Instead, say “Is safe drinking water an issue for you?”

Encourage people to fill in the section on comments. This is a valuable part of the assessment and can reveal important information that is not addressed anywhere else on the assessment form.

Why is there a space for people to put their name and address on the Village Environmental Planning Assessment?

At the end of the Village Environmental Planning Assessment, there is a section for each person being asked to complete the form to put their name and address. This allows you to return a copy of the assessment to that person along with a copy of the results. Encourage people to fill this information in but let them know that it is optional. Some people may prefer not to put their name.

Create a list of all the people who have completed the assessment just in case some people do not fill in their name and address. This will tell you who has and hasn’t filled one out for you.

It’s very important to make sure that each person who took the assessment receive a copy of the results if possible. This can be done by mailing to those who provided their name/address and by posting the results in visible local areas in the community for everyone else. This brings the assessment back to each person and gives that person ownership in the community planning process.

Compiling the results from the Village Environmental Planning Assessment

After the entire community completes an assessment form out, the next step is to take the answers from the forms and summarize them to show the results for the entire village. One way you can put together the results is described below.

Using the example of “Safe drinking water” on the sample Village Environmental Planning Assessment, we will go through one way to compile the information. For example, let’s say that the answers below for “Safe drinking water” came from ten people who filled out the Assessment:

A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water
A	1	2	3	4	5	Safe Drinking water

If you add up all the points for the drinking water statement, the total points equal 34. You can then use this number and compare it with the total points you get for other statements. For example, if you do the same for “Village dump/ landfill” and you get a total of 39 points, then you can conclude that the community sees the dump as a higher priority issue than safe drinking water. After adding up the answers for each issue, you can arrange the numbers in order from highest to lowest to show the issues from highest to lowest priority.

TIP FOR GOING THROUGH THE ASSESSMENTS

On a piece of paper (or in Excel) make a list of all the issues on the Village Environmental Planning Assessment. As you go through each person’s form, write his/her response next to each of the issues. Do this for each form. When you are done, add up all of the responses to get your total.

Your final results might look something like this.

There is a fill-in the blank excel format of the compilation sheet available on the ANTHC 7 Generations website

www.anthc.org/chs/ces/hve/

Priority	Position on Assessment	Issue	Number of People Responding	Total Points
1	D	Village dump/landfill	10	39
2	N	Contaminated subsistence foods	10	38
3	P	Hazardous/toxic materials left in dump	10	36
4	A	Safe drinking water	10	35
5	C	Beach and/or river erosion	10	34
6	G	Raw sewage spills in the community	10	34
7	K	Air pollution problems...	10	33
8	O	Old military sites cleanup	10	31
9	J	Fuel oil contaminated soils	10	30
10	M	Trash left in or around village	10	30
11	B	Abandoned vehicles, boats...	10	28
12	H	Annual clean-up program	10	27
13	F	Abandoned drums in village	10	26
14	L	Dead animals and fish left around village	10	22
15	Q	Other environ. issues beyond village control	10	20
16	I	Indoor air pollution	10	16
17	E	Construction materials left behind	10	14