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# SYNTHESIS OF FACILITATION, COMMUNICATION, INFORMATION, AND TECHNOLOGY TO ENHANCE PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT THROUGH THE TRANSPORTATION RESOURCE EXCHANGE CENTER (T-REX) WEB SITE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NEPA PLANNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS: A BEST PRACTICE

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## Abstract

The Transportation Resource Exchange Center (T-REX) is a first-of-its-kind Virtual Library dedicated to providing information about the transportation of radioactive materials to stakeholders. Guided by the principles of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning and decision-making process, the Web site was created to serve as a "one-stop shop," neutral source for information, to facilitate public involvement, overcome information gaps, and foster clearer communication and understanding among and between stakeholders regarding their issues of concern. Stakeholders are a diverse group with varying knowledge and interest. The T-REX was designed and is maintained to meet their differing needs. Several innovative features were created and implemented to maximize user friendliness and application utility of the T-REX.

Prior to the creation of the T-REX Web site, two tools were developed to identify the gaps between potential users' questions and the information that was available regarding stakeholder issues, so that user friendliness and application utility might be maximized by the Web site. The T-REX User Needs Assessment assessed the information needs and preferences of potential users representing the US Department of Energy (DOE) and non-DOE stakeholders. The National Transportation Information Resource Survey surveyed libraries and DOE reading rooms to identify what documents and kinds of information were available and where they were housed. In the most basic sense, the results produced by these two tools informed the T-REX designers of what information related to radioactive material transportation is available and which information is the most highly prized by the users. As an example, environmental issues and current news are two of the most-highly prized subjects of both DOE and non-DOE stakeholders. Daily updates from the US and around the world can be found on the Headlines Web page at <http://www.trex-center.org/nuevo.asp>.

From the user assessment information, a broad range of subject categories were compiled, including Carriers, Education/Training, Emergency Management, Health, Laws/Regulations, Packaging, Public Participation, Routes, States, Students/Teachers, and Tribal. Another aspect of study identified, compiled, and categorized all public comments and responses regarding transportation issues from DOE Environmental Impacts Statements (EIS) from 1995 to the present. The EIS is a detailed report, which must include any adverse environmental effects that cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented, as well as include alternatives to the proposed action. Furthermore, as mandated by NEPA, the EIS must include the relationship between local short-term uses of the human environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity, as well as any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources that would be involved in the proposed action. At specified times in the EIS process, the federal agency that seeks to initiate the proposed action is required to provide early notification to interested parties and solicit their views. During the comment periods, the stakeholders may ask questions or offer comments/responses orally or in writing to the federal agency in charge regarding the environmental impact or proposed remedies of the action. This T-REX study of EIS comments/responses was conducted to determine comment trends and produce a user-friendly set of frequently-asked-questions-and-answers. In addition to the resultant EIS Comment/Response Searchable Database, the products emerging from this effort are the Risk Communication Annotated Bibliography and the Routes Annotated Bibliography.

Within the T-REX Virtual Library, the TRAM Search Engine was designed to provide instantaneous results when a user queries the system for the DOE or non-DOE individuals or organizations that possess expertise or specific information regarding any aspect of the transportation process. There are over 850 individuals or groups listed in the TRAM. The TRAM database provides information including background or history, corporate

affiliates, geographic scope, information products, and contact information of the individuals or organizations that possess expertise or specific information regarding the transportation process. The logical data design of the TRAM is also based on the results of the user assessment and provider survey. The TRAM is located at <http://trex-center.org/thetram.asp>.

Several other features of the T-REX have been established to overcome information gaps. The T-REX-L, the listserv® to provide bulletins to T-REX patrons, is located at <http://www.trex-center.org/list.asp>. A toll free telephone information hotline is available at (877) 287-TREX (8739). Queries for information can also be made through the email address [trex@unm.edu](mailto:trex@unm.edu). The T-REXDEX is the searchable database of over 1,500 online documents in the T-REX Virtual Library and is located at <http://trex-center.org/dexsearch.asp>. The Reference Desk Web page links the T-REX pages that contain links to reference sources such as DOE Databases, DOE Public Reading Rooms and Libraries, DOE and other pertinent Online Serials, Glossaries, and Fact Sheets. The Reference Desk is located at <http://trex-center.org/reference.asp>. Portions of the T-REX also have been translated into the Spanish language, with plans to translate more sections in the future. Recursos en Español: or Resources in Spanish are located at <http://trex-center.org/spanish.asp>.

The T-REX is built on the assumption that the management of radioactive materials transport information for DOE and non-DOE stakeholders is like other bodies of knowledge. The collection, organization, and dissemination of this information is a complex and time-consuming process. The T-REX staff will ensure that users have the stakeholder information they need and that it is provided with maximum efficiency, user friendliness, and reliability. The two overarching goals in establishing and maintaining the T-REX Web site regarding the transportation of radioactive wastes and materials are: (1) Creating the premier online information resource for the "Nuclear Family," as well as the Global Community, and (2) Ensuring that the T-REX Web site is highly-visible, well-known, and trusted by stakeholders.

To the degree that the current trend continues toward greater collaboration among nations regarding radioactive waste management decisions, solutions, and transportation, the T-REX Web site is apt to become increasingly international in scope. In the future, the T-REX Web site may develop more international features and emphasis to better reach world audiences and international stakeholders.

Telephone queries and correspondence should be directed to Mary E. White. More information regarding the authors can be found on the ATRI Website at <http://www.unm.edu/~atr/>. The T-REX Web site is located at <http://www.trex-center.org/>.

The five-year contract from the US Department of Energy (DOE) National Transportation Program to the ATRI to create and maintain the T-REX will expire October 1, 2002. The total budget for the life of the contract is \$1.5 million.