

Community Engagement With Jackie Medcalf

Podcast | Environmental Law Monitor

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“Community engagement” is a frequently used but rarely defined term. What does community engagement mean, and, more importantly, how do you do it well?

In this episode of the Bracewell Environmental Law Monitor, host [Daniel Pope](#) talks with [Jackie Medcalf](#), founder, CEO and executive director of the [Texas Health and Environment Alliance](#), and Steven Cook, of counsel in Bracewell's [environment, lands and resources](#) practice about how companies and government agencies can better engage with communities on environmental issues. They discuss the challenges of communicating with the public, the reasons why early and open dialogue initiation is important and strategies that project managers can use to get their message across while letting residents be heard. Tune in for tips on how to balance cost-effectiveness and community concerns when addressing Superfund and construction projects.

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Featured Guests

Name: Steven Cook

About: Steven Cook advises clients on matters involving environmental and natural resources law and policy. Prior to joining Bracewell, Steven served as deputy assistant administrator at the Office of Land and Emergency Management of the Environmental Protection Agency.

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Name: Jackie Medcalf

About: Jackie Medcalf is the founder, CEO and executive director of the Texas Health and Environment Alliance, a Houston-based nonprofit that aims to protect public health and the environment by engaging, educating and empowering impacted communities to advocate effectively for the cleanup of historical contamination.

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Episode Highlights

[02:46] **The Personal Origins of Jackie's Public Health Mission:** Jackie discovered that toxic chemicals in the drinking water were making her family sick. When she learned of the existence of Superfund sites located near her home, she started attending EPA public meetings and found that the agency was doing a poor job of communicating technical information to the community.

[9:59] **Methods for Boosting Public Involvement:** Jackie describes ways the Texas Health and Environment Alliance performs regular community outreach over a period of years to transform people's understanding of remediation issues so they can be better informed and more engaged.

[14:06] **Private Industry Community Engagement:** It's not just the EPA that has a responsibility to engage with the community: Companies and industry groups also have an obligation to perform outreach around cleanup projects. Like the government, they sometimes struggle with this process.

[22:52] **Listen First; Talk Later:** A lot of times, community members just want to be heard and air grievances. This requires a lot of listening on the part of EPA and other responsible parties. Representatives who have compassion and the empathy to listen can foster more effective dialogue.

[28:57] **Two-Way Street:** Companies and agencies can do a better job of listening to the communities they serve, but communication is a two-way street. Residents can work on refining their message to better express their point of view and communicate constructively to advocate more effectively for their communities' interests.

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