

Guidance for Establishing Relationships with Tribes

Prepared by the Midwestern Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee's (MRMTC) Regional Tribal Engagement (RTE) Work Group

Why Should I Establish These Relationships?

The U.S. Constitution recognizes Native American Tribes as distinct governments with the same powers to regulate their internal affairs as federal and State governments. Therefore, shippers should consult with and treat Tribes affected by shipments of radioactive material in the same way they would States. Moreover, strong relationships built on trust and understanding are mutually beneficial for States and Tribes as they work towards the same goal, protecting their constituents through preparation, planning, coordination, and training. It also behooves States to develop relationships with Tribes to present a united front when negotiating with shippers and/or the federal government. Even if there are no federally recognized Tribal lands in your State, Tribes have historical and cultural connections to every State in the Midwest and may have treaty-protected hunting, fishing, and gathering rights that could be greatly affected by the transportation of radioactive materials. Finally, States should engage with Tribes because it is the right thing to do and an important first step in improving upon the historical mistreatment of Native American communities by federal and state governments in this country.

How Do I Establish These Relationships?

1. Understand that Tribes have different cultures, and you must be sensitive to the way each individual Tribe and Tribal government operates. There is no one size fits all when it comes to working with and consulting with Tribes.
2. Find out if your agency/department already has a Tribal liaison. If your agency/department does not, your State may have one at some level within state government.
3. If there is a Tribal liaison, introduce yourself, explain your work, and explain how you want to build relationships with area Tribes to collaborate on radioactive material shipment preparations.
4. If there is no Tribal liaison, consider ways you can undertake initial outreach on your own. Reaching out to the Tribal Radioactive Materials Transportation Committee (TRMTC) is a great first step. Additionally, most Tribes have websites that will list staff working on environmental or emergency management matters.
5. Invite that person to have a cup of coffee or to attend a meeting, an e-mail is not collaboration. Personal contacts make a big difference in the beginning.
6. It may be a custom to bring an offering or gift when meeting in person. This does not need to be a big item; perhaps a mug, ball cap, or pen. CSG Midwest can provide items as needed.



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7. If a Tribe has lands in two States, or borders two States (such as the Pokagon Band of Pottawatomi Indians in Michigan and Indiana and the Sac and Fox Nation in Kansas and Nebraska), work collaboratively with that State's counterpart on the MRMTC.
8. If these initial contacts lead to an invitation to attend a Tribal meeting or event, attend! For example, the Michigan Tribal Environmental Group (MTEG) meets regularly to discuss environmental issues affecting Tribes. Transportation and storage of radioactive materials is certainly a topic of interest to groups like this.
9. Understand that Tribes may not have the same resources that States have and that Tribal officials have to wear many different hats. Be prepared to provide information and do a little explaining about what shipments have occurred, what shipments will occur, and how those will affect Tribes.
10. Be consistent both individually and within your organization. It can be off-putting and diminish trust if you tell your contact one thing and a supervisor or colleague says something else.
11. Be flexible! You may have a point-by-point plan of what you want to discuss but be respectful of your hosts and be prepared to discuss what is important to them in that moment, not what you deemed important ahead of time.
12. Once relationships are established and Tribal contacts understand your work and the world of radioactive materials transportation, provide ways for them to deepen their involvement. This can be done through the MRMTC RTE Work Group, TRMTC, the Nuclear Energy Tribal Working Group (NETWG), the State and Tribal Government Working Group (STGWG), etc.
13. Just like in State government, Tribes experience a lot of personnel turnover, so it is important to document what outreach has been done and involve many people within your organization so that institutional knowledge is not lost in the end.



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