

Speaking Up & Reaching Out: Increasing Community Engagement in the Twin Cities Superfund Process

Rachel Benson

Thesis Advisors: Dr. Joe Storlien & Dr. Derek Larson

Introduction

Superfund is a program under the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that was designed to clean up environmentally contaminated sites throughout the United States. Since its creation, funding for the program has substantially decreased and the process has gained a stigma for having become a slow, inefficient process. This research seeks to answer: does active public participation contribute to a more efficient Superfund cleanup process? And how can we incorporate the most effective community engagement possible at Superfund sites in the Twin Cities metropolitan region of Minnesota?

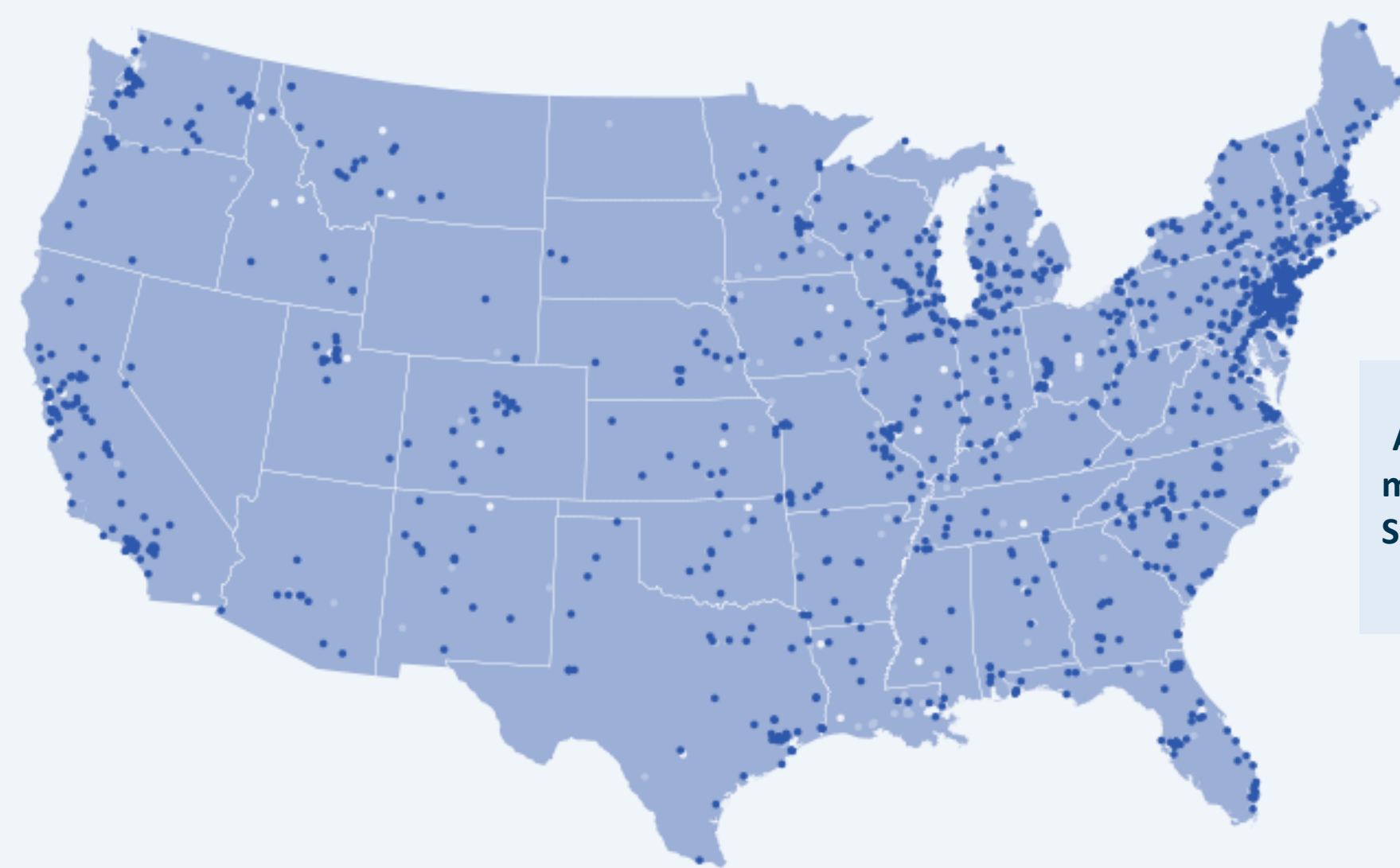


Figure 1: Nearly 1 in 6 Americans live within three miles of the more than 1,700 Superfund sites in the nation

Methods

- Use scholarly articles to determine whether public participation matters in effectiveness and efficiency of Superfund cleanups.
- Use the EPA Superfund database to select four case studies that would demonstrate both successful community engagement strategies and ways in which community engagement failed.
- Compare each case study to Arnstein's Ladder of Participation and four different public participation frameworks: Science-Centered Stakeholder Consultation, Egalitarian Deliberation, Efficient Cooperation, and Informed Collaboration.
- Apply strategies to a community engagement framework in the Twin Cities of Minnesota

Case Studies

Site	Contamination Issues	Lessons Learned
Love, Canal, NY 1983	Over 21,000 tons of hazardous chemicals disposed of in a local landfill-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create citizen-led coalitions • Engage in multiple types of activism • Create a sense of urgency
Saltville, VA 1996	Contaminants consisting mostly of heavy metals found in soil, sediment, surface water, and groundwater from local chlorine gas plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always recognize cultural, social, political, and economic context of a site • Build trust between EPA and community
Tifton, GA 1989	Chemicals from pesticide and herbicide formulation plant contaminated soil and groundwater	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize environmental justice concerns • Build trust among stakeholders • Allow community participation in data collection
Seattle, WA 2001	Duwamish River contaminated with PCBs, arsenic, and other carcinogenic chemicals from several industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ a variety of educational programming • Provide technical assistance • Celebrate unique aspects of the community

Why does public participation matter?

A 2007 study found that when citizens participate in Superfund procedure, the EPA is more likely to choose a more health protective, effective remedy. In other words, the EPA is most responsive to sites that have active community engagement. The study also found that Superfund sites with fewer African Americans are more likely to have responsive cleanups from the EPA, suggesting that an inefficient Superfund process is an environmental justice issue.

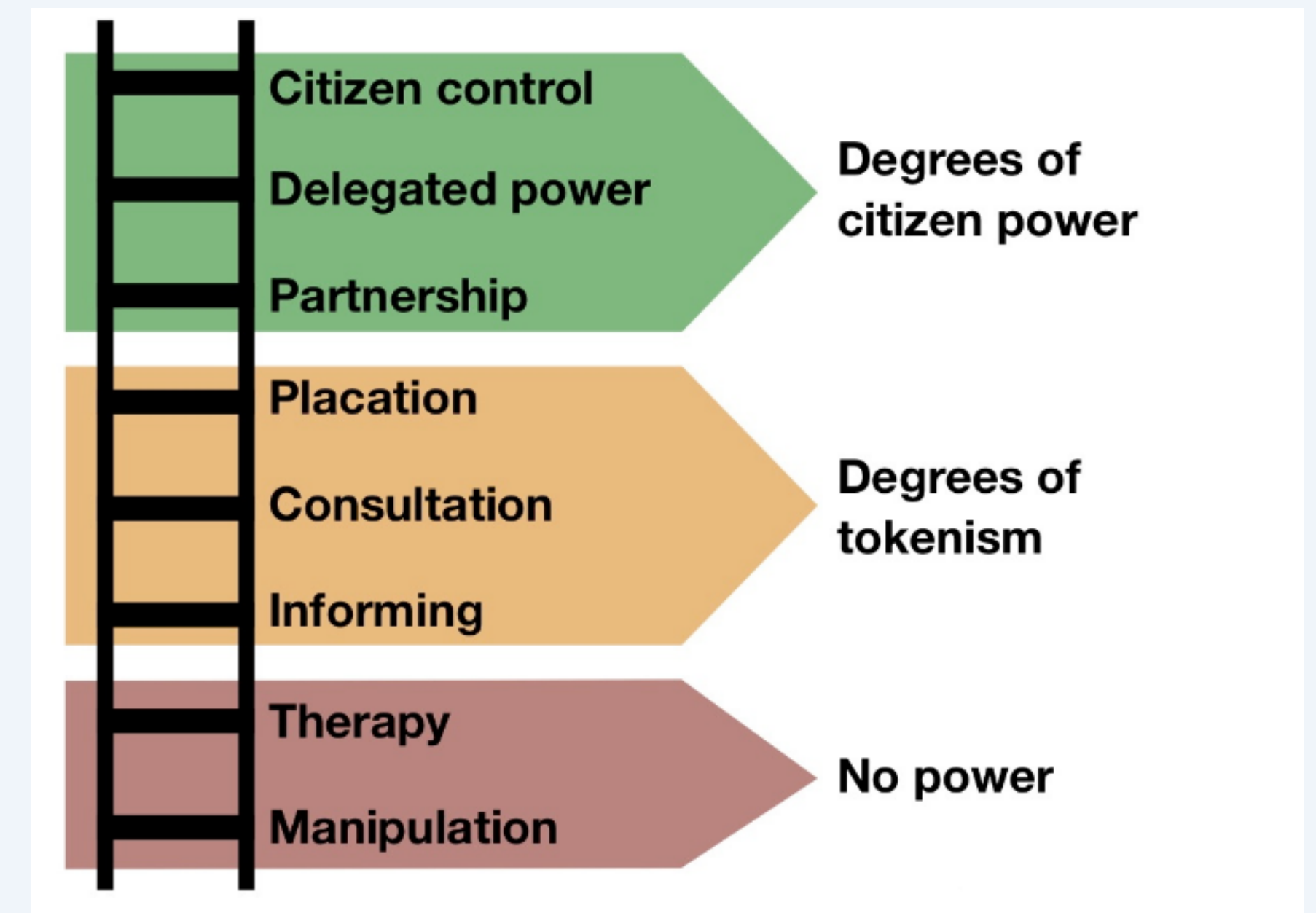


Figure 2: Arnstein's Ladder Degrees of Citizen Participation

Conclusion

- Community engagement measures keep the EPA and other stakeholders accountable, leading to a more thorough and effective cleanup process.
- The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is in charge of cleanup in the Twin Cities, often partnering with the Minnesota Department of Health. Most of the sites are affected by chemical contamination in landfills, soil, sediments, and groundwater. Most of the sites employ an Egalitarian Deliberation framework, meaning that communication strategies mostly consist of distributing information to community members but little is done to provide citizens opportunities for decision-making.
- Superfund sites can broaden their community engagement efforts by building coalitions and seeking more stakeholders, using interactive workshops to increase environmental literacy, creating programming that celebrates the culture and history of the affected community, and providing forums for technical assistance.