

SPELLCON 2002 CONFERENCE

Gore Bay Terminal Community Relations

John Gebler

What is outside Shell's fence

A community a mixture of

- Old families, sometimes third and fourth generations
- "Blow-ins" like myself who have only been there 20 years
- Newcomers paying small fortunes for homes \$1- \$2 M
- Every occupation or profession and resource you could ever want

My Involvement

- Moved in 1980
- Located across the lane from the unloading berth

At that time, demands were that Shell move out, on the assumption by many that the park would be extended from Manns Pt over the site

Soon afterwards the nearby gasworks at Waverton closed and were replaced with unit complex containing 900 bedroom, repeat 900 bedroom

It realised that Shell would probably be replaced by 300 to 500 is home units in high-density apartments

While infrastructure such as gas, water, sewerage, and electricity could be upgraded at developers expense, the already over strained roads could not be

On the other hand, attractive as a windfall profit from sale of the site may have been to Shell, closure of Gore Bay would also give them other troubles.

Alternative to Gore Bay being the supply chain of crude to Clyde, would be building a replacement pipeline from Botany Bay to Clyde and possibly storage at Botany Bay
Therefore there was a mutual interest for both Shell and the community that there be a suitable living arrangements between the two.

Main problems of Shell to the community

- noise
- smell
- safety/risk
- traffic
- visual

Main problems of the community to Shell

- proximity of vocal residents living in what had become expensive homes.
- complaints to Environmental Protection Authority on smell and noise.
- General problems of industrial site within residential area.

Some specific activities that caused friction

- Trucks delivering along narrow Greenwich Road of products shipped in
- Installation of security lights facing outwards into the community. I had 11,000 watts of high-intensity halogen lights shining into my kitchen and bedroom. A neighbour had something like twice that amount into his house

- In general, lack of understanding of refinery staff designing alterations to being within residential area, not industrial area. e.g. pipework that could be layed along grounds was stood up on stands overhead in everybody's view, because that was what is done for convenience of maintenance in the refinery

The community committee was formed in 1990 about the same time that Lane Cove Council directed Shell to conduct a Risk Assessment of the site. This assessment revealed some shortcomings in the terminal

I believe the turning point in relations was when one of the Shell senior officers, who responsibilities included Gore Bay, made his home in Greenwich at the Point and became involved in the community. He learnt what the community felt far better than we could have told hem, as he was involved with his children of the local school and other matters. I think Shell owes a lot to Paul Zealand for that initiative Also helpful was the Clyde manager visiting us at night and being unable to see where he was walking, due to the glare when he went out my back door to look at the security lights

So what has happened over the years on various matters

smells

- better control of crude being shipped into Gore Bay e.g. avoidance of those likely to emit rotten eg gas or similar odours
- ships prevented from over pressurising their tanks with inert gas when discharging
- some storage tanks fitted with active carbon filters on the ventilation to reduce odours

noise

- selection of ships to a void those with noisy deep well pumps or decks whose plates "drum" with the pumps.
- that better mounting of on shore pumps and fitting of sound reducing enclosures
- prevention of whistling from venting of over pressurised ships tanks
- prevention of officers of ships shouting their orders in the middle of the night on the loudspeaker system

traffic

- products no longer distributed from depot reducing traffic through Greenwich

Visual

- Shell have an ongoing program of removing unneeded tanks, some of which I suspect are older then any of us in this room, and refurbishing those tanks that remain to make them is visually acceptable..
- I would like to see the whole lot replaced with concrete tanks underground such are of the top of Neutral Bay where oil storage tanks were built during World War II, and now the residents do not even remember they are there, though I think is that somewhat ambitious.

What has all this achieved.

The best demonstration of what is achieved is reaction of the community to the oil spill from the Laura D'Amado .

I have no doubt that if that occurred in the earliest days of the 1980's there would have been screaming and outbursts from the community and probably rightly so, as in those days there was little response to community concerns.

During the spill crisis Shell has an overwhelming support from the Greenwich community even though there were reporters running round trying to beat up stories from people on how terrible Shell was; and how they should move out of the harbour altogether. Residents even effectively monitored what was being told to reporters and put them right before it went to press.

I know of one case where a woman was feeding a story to a reporter about how she was selling her home because of the terrible and continual smells, even though she was on the far western side of the point. Needless to say the reporter was furiously writing it all down as if he has finally hit the reporters proverbial Eldorado. Another resident was standing nearby and when the woman had gone informed the reporter that far from Shell being the cause of her leaving, it was that her husband had had enough of her and had left, and the house had to be sold as part of the settlement. The reporter uttered a well known four letter word, slashed lines across his notebook, and nothing more was heard about it.

Another reporter spent about twenty minutes pressuring a housewife adjacent to Shell, apparently on the assumption that she was 'just a housewife' and using all sorts of loaded questions, to get her to say that Shell should go; with just the opposite response. Any else here who are married to ex ward sisters will know what a mistake that reporter made in his assumptions. He had similar responses all the way along the street.

That reporter actually wrote of her support and named her in the newspaper. This is where in community relations attention to detail can be very rewarding. Somebody at Shell had the time, in the middle of all their problems, to send her a bunch of flowers. Very low cost but excellent recognition, not only to her, but to all around who knew of it

When you step back and look and ask what has Shell had done to reach this position and what it has cost, the answer is really, not much.

The expensive items, such as upgrading the fire protection etc to reduce the risk factors; the reduction of noise levels to at least EPA requirements; the reduction of pollution from venting of tanks and ships, to again meet EPA requirements were all required by statutes and necessary if they were not to be closed or heavily fined and therefore were not cost of community relations. The repainting of tanks in use, and removal of old tanks were maintenance matters that had to be done eventually.

The open days every two or three years for school children and residents have demystified the site for apprehensive neighbours. I suspect that that the managers have used these to have regular clean up and clean out of the site

I doubt that the cost of the monthly meetings, the minor matters such as doors at the entry to prevent noise of sailors waiting for cabs annoying residents opposite, could even be found in the accounts

There were some other costs such as donations to Lane Cove Council's concerts, some donations to local Greenwich Village games when they started, to the Neighbourhood Watch, donation of a duty boat to the local sailing club, all of which

helped. These were duly publicly recognised, or effectively flagged with Shell emblems, but could not be called expensive

The real and least costly change was just from a confrontational attitude to the community, to a cooperative attitude, which led to

- The formation of the committee to provide for communications back and forth
- The listening rather than ignoring
- The recognition that the surroundings are residential not industrial

Do not think that all has been sweetness and light on every issue. We have had differences on a number of matters such as night movement and berthing of tankers, on the non-use or reduction of tugs for movement in the harbour and berthing.

My message, if there is one, is that community relations is not an expensive exercise in itself

It is not surrendering your management control or sovereignty of your site.

It just means listening, and responding if possible, but explaining why if you cannot

It can however deliver enormous dividends in times when you need community support.

I have no doubt that Shell would have had a far worse time if, during the Laura d'Amado incident, they had had the previously alienated residents fighting them and stirring up an aggressive press, as well as having to face the various regulatory authorities