

# Riverbend City: Government And Community Collaboration Mission

## Introduction: Welcome to Riverbend City

**Expository Text:** *It is the one-year anniversary of the chemical spill. Unfortunately, the public health department has made an alarming find—dangerous polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the water and soil. While the source of the PCBs is yet unknown, there's a good chance the PCBs are there as a result of the train derailment. When the public finds out, citizens are scared and angry. They demand action.*

**Instructional Text:** *The city has a mess on its hand—and it's going to need some kind of partnership with the public as part of the solution. As you read this mission, consider the city's options for collaborating with the public.*

### Characters in this Mission:

- Keith Bauer, Mayor
- Roger Chaska, Tribal Councilman
- Nicole Fernandez, Fourth Grade Teacher
- Rick Hilliard, Press Secretary
- Rosemary James, Director of Nursing, Maplewood Rest Home
- David Julian, Reporter for WDDO Television
- Victor Maldonado, Community Activist
- Master N-Roc, Local Hip Hop Artist
- Felicity Pearson, Elementary School Art Teacher
- Galen Pearson, Environmental Health Director, Public Health Department
- Peggy Truman, Director of Hennessee County Department of Public Health
- Adele Walker, Chief of Staff

## Scene 1: Pearson Living Room

**Expository Text:** *Galen Pearson—the Environmental Health Director for the Public Health Department—watches television at home with his wife, Felicity.*

### Dialogue 01: Reporter David Julian updates the public on the chemical spill.

DAVID:  
Thank you for watching WDDO News. I'm David Julian. Tonight's top story is the one-year anniversary of the Riverbend City chemical spill. As memorial services are held around the city to commemorate the victims, questions remain. What are the long-term effects of the chemicals that were released into our community's water, soil, and air? And what does this mean for the health of our citizens—and especially for our children?

One man who's been very busy this year is Jim Siler of the Allied Chemical Company. He has been testing Riverbend City's water supply regularly since the spill occurred. I spoke with Jim earlier today about the possibility of water contamination either now, or some time in the future...

### Dialogue 02: Felicity and Galen discuss the news broadcast.

FELICITY:  
That David Julian is such a trip! Remember that story he did about how the Mayor's Easter egg hunt might be spreading salmonella?

GALEN:

Yeah, he's quite the environmental hypochondriac. Can't wait to see what he says when he finds out about the PCBs.

FELICITY:

Um...the what?

GALEN:

PCBs. We just discovered them last week in our latest round of soil sampling.

FELICITY:

Galen, what are you talking about? PCBs have been banned since the 1970s.

GALEN:

Mostly. But they're still used in train transformers. So there's a good possibility the train derailment was the cause of an unknown amount of PCB contamination.

FELICITY:

Oh my God! What does this mean?

GALEN:

Well, hopefully not much. We need to determine the extent of the spill. It may be resolved with a simple cleanup effort. On the other hand, there's the possibility that we've got an EPA Superfund Site on our hands.

FELICITY:

I...I can't believe you didn't tell me this! PCBs are scary stuff! They're linked to cancer, birth defects, liver damage...

GALEN:

Now you sound like David Julian. We don't know yet that this is going to be a crisis. There's a good chance it won't be.

FELICITY:

And I can't believe the public doesn't know about this! When is Mayor Bauer going to release this information?

GALEN:

When more information becomes available.

FELICITY:

Not if I have anything to do with it! I'm calling Laurie Boyett at the Free Press right away.

GALEN:

Um, yeah...and then I'll be out of a job because my boss will know where the leak came from.

FELICITY:

Galen, the public health department sampling records are public. I'll call Laurie and tell her to go look at the records. She's an old friend and she won't disclose my name.

GALEN:

I suppose there's no way to talk you out of this?

FELICITY:

The public needs to know, Galen!

## Scene 2: Ruby Lake, San Lorenzo Catholic Church

**Expository Text:** *After the Riverbend City Free Press exposes the PCB issue, citizens are angry and frightened. Felicity Pearson quickly forms a grassroots organization called Citizens Lobbying for Environmental Action and Responsibility (CLEAR). The first meeting is in the basement of the San Lorenzo Catholic Church.*

**Optional Content:** Master N-Roc's Rap

Lyrics:

Two kids killed in a chemical spill  
Government cover up, I wonder what's real?

Mayor Bauer's a coward, won't tell us the deal

The powers that be, looking sour to me

So how could it be we ain't out in the streets?  
Protesting with a vengeance to get Bauer impeached

He's out of touch, pockets plush with hush money  
A toxic plume looms in a sky that was sunny

Who is safe in Ruby Lake when you evacuate?  
It's a disgrace, Ingles was the wrong language

So yeah, mister mayor you made it so clear  
Sho nuff, you don't care about us, you don't care!

Outro:

Mayor Bauer, next time you come to my neighborhood asking me to vote for you I'm gonna ask you "What have you done for me lately?"

### **Dialogue 03: Felicity starts the meeting.**

FELICITY:

I want to thank you all so much for coming to this first meeting of the Citizens Lobbying for Environmental Action and Responsibility. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Felicity Pearson. I'm an elementary school art teacher and have been active in the Riverbend City community for years. I can't tell you how grateful I am to see so many people at this meeting today.

As you know, the Free Press recently ran a shocking exposé on last year's chemical spill. In addition to all the known problems that came out of that spill, the train derailment may have caused PCB contamination. We don't know yet the extent of the contamination, but we do know that PCBs are extremely dangerous and have been conclusively linked to cancer, liver disease, birth defects, and a whole host of serious health problems.

So when the government found out about this crisis, the first thing they did was inform the public, right? Wrong! Lord only knows when they were going to get around to telling us. We shouldn't have to count on the media to provide us with crucial information like this. That's not what democracy is all about!

(applause)

The purpose of this organization is to demand that the government take action! We need thorough testing done *immediately* to determine the extent of the damage. If people have been affected by the PCBs, they need immediate access to health care services. And we need the city to once and for all hold Southern Inlet Railroad responsible for the damage they've caused the people of this city! Mayor Bauer is in bed with Southern Inlet Railroad and refuses to hold them accountable. *This has to stop now!*

(applause)

### **Dialogue 04: Community activist Victor Maldonado expresses his concerns.**

VICTOR:

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Victor Maldonado, a community activist here in the Ruby Lake neighborhood. Felicity, thank you for putting together this meeting and for holding it here in Ruby Lake.

FELICITY:

Well, there's no better place to hold this meeting, Victor. The Ruby Lake neighborhood was significantly affected by the train derailment, so I'm sure people in this neighborhood are very concerned about chemical exposures.

NICOLE:

That's putting it mildly. Hi, everyone. My name is Nicole Fernandez. I'm a fourth-grade teacher down the street at Ruby Lake Elementary School, and I'm also Victor's fiancé. We're all especially concerned about the PCBs because of the way that the city mishandled the evacuation of Ruby Lake after the chemical spill. Nobody here has much faith that the government has our best interests at heart!

FELICITY:

Nicole, in case anyone here doesn't know, can you elaborate on how the city mishandled the evacuation of this neighborhood?

NICOLE:

It was chaos down here. There were supposed to be busses to get people out, but they didn't come for close to an hour. And the police did a terrible job directing traffic out of the neighborhood.

VICTOR:

And don't forget the Reverse 911 call. We were sent a Reverse 911 call from the city with evacuation instructions. But the call was in English only. This neighborhood is over 70 percent Latino and many people don't speak English.

NICOLE:

That doesn't exactly send us the message that the city is concerned about the people in this neighborhood.

ROSEMARY:

I agree. Hello, everyone. My name is Rosemary James. I don't live in this neighborhood, but I work at the Maplewood Rest Home, which is a block away from here. We had to evacuate the nursing home after the chemical spill, and we were depending upon the city to send us ambulances to transport our non-ambulatory patients to the emergency shelter. The ambulances were very slow to come, and at first they only sent us three instead of the dozens that we needed. Evacuating a nursing home is a very dangerous exercise because so many of our patients are in poor health and have serious cardiac conditions. We're very lucky no one died.

VICTOR:

Thank you, Rosemary. As you can see, people in this neighborhood don't trust the government. If Ruby Lake needs help because of exposure to chemicals that no one's told us about, it's hard to believe they'll be willing and able to help us now.

MASTER N-ROC:

The mayor isn't gonna do #\$\$%! to help this neighborhood. Just like he didn't do #\$\$%! to help this neighborhood during the evacuation. You better believe that if this was a white neighborhood, the evacuation would have gone better.

FELICITY:

For those of you who don't know this gentleman, his name is Leonard Zorfwood. You probably know him better by his stage name, Master N-Roc. He's a long time community activist here in Riverbend City.

ROSEMARY:

Leonard, I don't know if it's fair to accuse the mayor of being racist.

MASTER N-ROC:

Are you kidding? You really think the mayor would have put lives in danger in a white neighborhood? All I know is that if poor people or minorities in Riverbend City got exposed to PCBs, the Mayor isn't going to do #\$\$%! about it unless we fight him every step of the way.

#### **Dialogue 05: Roger Chaska, a Tribal Councilman for the Mahnomen Indian Reservation, expresses his concerns.**

ROGER:

Hello. My name is Roger Chaska, and I'm on the tribal council at the Mahnomen Indian Reservation. As you may know, the chemical spill has had a big economic and environmental impact on our land, our people, and our culture. After the spill, chemicals travelled through the ground from the spill site and damaged our wild rice crop. In addition, some of our businesses were closed for several weeks because of concern about our ground water. This includes the Brown Trout Casino, which is a major source of revenue. To this day, business at the casino is down because the public is afraid of contamination. This has had a significant impact on our economy.

Considering how badly our reservation was hurt by the chemical spill, we are alarmed to hear that PCBs were involved as well.

FELICITY:

Roger, has the Riverbend City government or Southern Inlet Railroad talked with you and offered to compensate you fairly for the economic losses to the Mahnomen Indian Reservation?

ROGER:

No. Right after the spill, there were lots of meetings about how they were going to help us out. But we still haven't heard anything concrete.

MASTER N-ROC (highly sarcastic):

Imagine that. Mayor Bauer turned his back on the Indian reservation!

FELICITY:

You're in the right place, Roger. We need to make sure the government and the railroad company do the right thing. We're all in this together.

### **Dialogue 06: Community member Rosemary James has questions about the function of CLEAR.**

ROSEMARY:

I know that a lot of you have experience working in grassroots organizations like this one. But this is all very new to me. Can you explain to me how this works? How do we make change happen?

VICTOR:

Well, we're just getting started, Rosemary. So one thing we need to do is develop a specific action plan. But the purpose of groups like this is to work with the government to make sure the voices of the people are heard.

NICOLE:

That's a little over-optimistic, Victor, don't you think? I don't think we're here to work *with* the government. We're here to put pressure on the government and the Southern Inlet Railroad so that they do the right thing.

VICTOR:

But we can accomplish that much easier if we don't position ourselves as adversarial. I'm hoping we can help put together a town hall meeting with the mayor to voice our concerns.

MASTER N-ROC:

Voice our concerns? You think the mayor's gonna listen to us? Mayor Bauer only cares what the people have to say when there's an election—especially poor people and people with brown skin.

ROGER:

I hate to say it, but that's been our experience, too.

VICTOR:

We have to give it a try. I've worked with the mayor before. It's true that he comes off as being insensitive to diversity issues, but he does make an effort.

MASTER N-ROC:

You crazy, man. The only way we're going to get anything accomplished is by making a lot of noise and putting every kind of pressure we can on the government.

ROSEMARY:

Can we do both? Work with the government *and* put pressure on it?

FELICITY:

I think so, Rosemary. In my opinion, that's how things are supposed to work. But we'll have to see what happens.

### **Scene 3: City County Building, Mayor's Office**

**Expository Text:** As you can imagine, the mayor's none too happy about the PCBs, the Free Press exposé, Citizens Lobbying for Environmental Action and Responsibility, and the general public outcry. He holds an emergency meeting with members of his staff and the Public Health Department to address the issue.

### **Dialogue 07: The mayor, his staff, and Public Health Director Peggy Truman discuss finding ways to regain public trust.**

KEITH:

All right, everyone, we have some important work to do. The public's ready to throw me into the river. People are justifiably angry that the government didn't inform the public right away about the PCB issue.

PEGGY:

It's not your fault, Keith. We were going to report this to the public soon. We were holding off until we did more testing so that we had more complete information to give the public. There's nothing wrong with that.

KEITH:

Well, the public doesn't see things that way.

RICK:

Look, unfortunately, we've got a situation where the public doesn't think we're working with them. They think we're trying to cover our hide and protect Southern Inlet. What we need to do is regain the public trust and convey the sense that we're working together to deal with the PCB issue.

PEGGY:

I have an idea. Why don't we reactivate the hotline we established after the chemical spill to answer questions? That was a big success.

ADELE:

Great idea, Peggy. That's a good way to let the public know we're listening to them. And if this turns into an environmental crisis, it'll be a great way to communicate important information.

PEGGY:

Good. I'll get to work on that right away after the meeting.

RICK:

Peggy, what's the latest on the soil and water sampling?

PEGGY:

Nothing new to report. We're running tests and the EPA is running tests. I think we'll have more conclusive information at the end of the week.

RICK:

Well, I recommend we be sure to get that information out to the public as soon as we have it.

#### **Dialogue 08: The team discusses strategies for creating a community collaboration plan.**

PEGGY:

All right. Re-establishing the hotline is a great start. But I think we need to do more to demonstrate to the public that we're working with them and not against them.

ADELE:

I agree. I think it's time we meet with members of the public directly.

RICK:

Absolutely. What we need is a community collaboration plan to get the public involved.

KEITH:

I'm all for that. What I'd like to do is schedule some town hall meetings. We could invite members of this CLEAR grassroots group, and anybody else who has something to say about the situation.

ADELE:

And where do we go from there?

KEITH:

We just listen. We take down everyone's opinions and use that to help develop a plan to address the best way to handle the possible environmental, economic, and health implications of the PCB situation.

PEGGY:

That's one good option, Keith. However, I was thinking maybe we try something more collaborative than the "meeting to listen to complaints" approach.

KEITH:

What do you mean?

PEGGY:

Well, I was thinking we get members of the public more directly involved in a consolidation conference. We form a group that consists of both government officials and members of the community. In this case, we could include representatives from Citizens Lobbying for Environmental Action and Responsibility, and also representatives from the Mahanomen Indian Reservation. We might also include people from the community who have an understanding of chemicals, like Gail

Armstrong. She's a well known chemistry professor at Beck University.

KEITH:

Okay. But what happens in the group?

PEGGY:

Recommendations are made by everyone on how to resolve the situation, and everyone discusses the proposals together. That way, people are directly involved. In a situation like this, we need community ideas. We need people to stop thinking that the government makes decisions in secret behind closed doors.

KEITH:

Well, I hear what you're saying, Peggy. But that approach makes me nervous. That sounds like a "too many cooks can spoil the soup" situation. We are the government and we have the responsibility. A consolidation conference could give people who don't know much about policy or chemicals too much influence. Also, other people who aren't included might think we're playing favorites.

RICK:

But do you think the recommendations from the public will be helpful?

KEITH:

Possibly. But this is serious stuff we're dealing with. If we're going to make decisions about how to handle a chemical exposure crisis, I want recommendations from people like Peggy—not from a community activist.

PEGGY:

You *will* get recommendations from people like me. And you'll also get recommendations from members of the public.

KEITH:

Well, don't get me wrong. I really do want to hear from the public. I just think a series of town hall meetings will give citizens plenty of opportunities to be heard. Adele? What do you think?

ADELE:

That's a tricky one, Keith. I can see advantages and disadvantages of both the town hall approach and the consolidation conference approach. Let's discuss this further.

## Mission Summary

Congratulations. You have completed the Government and Community Collaboration Mission.

Having completed this mission, consider the best approach for involving the public. Would a town hall approach be best? Or a consolidation conference? Or would you suggest a combination of the two, or some other approach?

## Summary Document Content

LOCATIONS:

In this mission, you visited three locations:

- The living room of Galen Pearson, the Environmental Health Director of the Public Health Department, and his wife Felicity Pearson, an art teacher and community activist.
- The basement of the San Lorenzo Catholic Church, where members of the newly formed Citizens Lobbying for Environmental Action and Responsibility (CLEAR) meet.
- The mayor's office, where officials discuss strategies for partnering with the public to address a potential environmental crisis.

THEMES:

This mission presented a scenario that led up to a question; what's the best way to collaborate with the public when a serious public issue is involved? In this case, the public became outraged after a media leak revealed the possibility of a chemical contamination crisis involving PCBs. In response, the mayor and his staff discussed possible ways to involve the

public in discussions and decisions. The mayor favored town hall meetings, where members of the public would be invited to voice their opinions. The public health director favored the more participatory consolidation conference approach, where members of the public would have a more direct voice in suggesting and discussion public policy outcomes. Learners are left to decide for themselves—what's the best approach to this situation?

RESOURCES:

Clickable boom box with a clip from Master N-Roc's single.