

**Project Summary:
Focus Groups for Assessing Public Opinions
on Visibility Impairment due to Air Pollution**

The purpose of this project is to obtain information regarding public opinions on visibility impairment due to air pollution. EPA will use these findings to inform its review of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for Particulate Matter (PM). Secondary NAAQS are established to protect against adverse effects on public welfare, and one of the welfare effects associated with airborne PM is visibility impairment. These focus groups will provide important information on people's views regarding the discernability and acceptability of differing levels of visibility impairment.

A contractor, Abt Associates Inc., will coordinate the focus group process for EPA. The contractor will work with local firms to recruit participants in 6 or 7 U.S. metropolitan areas. Participants will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion which will last 2 or 2 ½ hours. Approximately 9-12 persons will be recruited for each focus group session. Participation will be voluntary. Participants will have to expend time, effort, and possibly travel expense to participate in the study. As such, the participants will be compensated for their time and travel.

At each focus group session, participants will be shown a series of slides illustrating a variety of visibility conditions using a common scene of the city in which the focus group is being conducted. The WINHAZE visual air quality modeling program, developed by Air Resource Specialists, will be used to simulate visibility conditions under different air quality conditions. In the first portion of the focus group session, participants will be asked to rate the visual quality of a number of images by providing individual responses in a booklet. In the second portion, the contractor will facilitate a discussion in which participants will be asked to talk about their responses. Below are two examples of the type of images that will be used in the focus group sessions.



EPA is soliciting

comments on the proposed focus group questions, as indicated in the Federal Register notice published on [Insert date]. Comments should be submitted on or before [Insert date 60 days after publication]. Comments should be submitted to Mr. Rich Damberg, Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, Mail Code 15, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Research Triangle Park NC 27711, email damberg.rich@epa.gov, phone 919-541-5592, fax 919-541-7690.

Focus Group Questions

1. Screening Questions

Purpose: To collect demographic data for future analysis of focus group results. Specific questions will also collect information on participants' baseline strength of importance of environmental and air quality issues to participant. This information will be collected prior to the focus group session.

Questions:

< Gender Female _____ Male _____

< Your age (in years) _____

< Total number of people living in your household _____

< Number of people living in your household under the age of 18 _____

< The highest level of education you have completed

- _____ Some high school
- _____ High school graduate
- _____ Some college or trade school
- _____ College graduate
- _____ Graduate school or advanced degree

< Your total household gross income in 1999

- _____ Less than \$12,000
- _____ \$12,000 to \$24,999
- _____ \$25,000 to \$39,999
- _____ \$40,000 to \$59,000
- _____ \$60,000 to \$99,999
- _____ More than \$100,000
- _____ Don't know

< Race

- _____ White
- _____ Black or African American
- _____ Hispanic or Latino
- _____ Asian
- _____ American Indian or Alaska Native
- _____ Other

< In general, how important are environmental issues to you?

- Not important at all
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Extremely important

< How important is the air quality in the [city name] area to you?

- Not important at all
- Somewhat important
- Important
- Extremely important

2. Representativeness of View

Once at the focus group session, participants will be shown a slide of the vista of [city name] that will be used throughout the session.

Purpose: To determine whether the vista of the city is a typical view for the respondent, and if not a typical view, how it varies from the one they experience most often.

Questions:

< How often do you see a view like the one in this slide?

- Frequently (once a day)
- Occasionally (once a week)
- Infrequently (once a month)
- Rarely (once a year)
- Never
- Other _____ (please fill in)

< How does the view in the slide compare to the view you see typically?

- My typical view is more scenic
- My typical view is less scenic
- My typical view is about the same
- Other _____ (please fill in)

< What aspects of this view are different from the view you see most often?

< Where are you / what are you doing when you normally see a view similar to this one?

- Commuting to/from work
- At home
- At work
- Performing day-to-day activities
- Outdoor leisure activities
- Other _____ (please fill in)

3. Rating of Visibility Conditions

Participants will be shown 20-25 slides representing different levels of visibility in [city name] in random order, with at least 5 “reliability” slides that repeat some of the visibility levels in the 20-25 slides. Both the random order and the reliability slides will change for each focus group session. Each slide is shown for 10-15 seconds. Participants will be asked to rate all 20-25 slides.

Purpose: This section asks the participants to rate the visibility conditions in the slides. This section provides the participants with an opportunity to practice ranking slides, and also provides some calibration and opportunity to check consistency with opinion questions in next section.

Questions:

< Please rate the quality of visibility for each of the images you see using the scale below. Please CIRCLE the appropriate response below.

Very Poor Poor Below Average Average Above Average Good Very Good

4. Rating of Acceptability / Unacceptability

Participants will be shown the same set of slides that they rated for visibility conditions again, and will be asked to rate all 20-25 slides. Participants will then be shown a subset of 3-5 of the original slides, and asked to rate the slides using an alternative rating scale.

Purpose: To determine for each slide the level of visibility in each slide is acceptable or unacceptable to participants. Also, to determine the length of time and number of days that the visibility levels could be endured by the participants for particular visibility level.

Questions:

- < Please indicate whether you find the level of visibility Acceptable or Unacceptable for each of the slides presented. Please CIRCLE the appropriate rating below.

Unacceptable

Acceptable

- < For each of the slides presented, assume that the level of visibility impairment shown would represent an average condition in your city over some period of time. Please indicate the period of time you could experience this average level of visibility impairment and find it to be Acceptable, ranging from Never Acceptable to Always Acceptable.

Never 1 hour 4 hours 1 day 2 days 1 week 1 month Always

5. General Importance / Awareness of Visibility Issues

Purpose: To check for consistency in screener estimate on baseline strength of importance of air quality issues to participant. Data will also help in analyzing responses to rating of visibility conditions and acceptability/unacceptability. Finally, participants are asked to put themselves in two hypothetical situations, and answer a question about the relationship between an air quality policy and their cost of living.

Questions:

- < Generally speaking, how often do you notice the quality of visibility on a given day?

___ Never
___ Hardly ever
___ Sometimes
___ Often
___ Always

- < How important are visibility conditions are in the [city name] area to you?

___ Not important at all
___ Somewhat important
___ Important
___ Extremely important

- < Imagine that you must choose between two pollution control strategies. One will give you visibility like that in the first photograph, and it is associated with an annual cost of living increase of \$10. The second choice will give you visibility like that in the second photograph, and it is associated with an annual cost of living increase of \$50. You also have a third choice: you would be equally happy with either of the two policies. Which choice best reflects your preferences?

- Choice A
 Choice B
 I'm equally happy with either choice
 I don't know

6. Discussion of Slide Rating Process

Identify two slides that the majority of participants found acceptable or where just over 50 percent of the participants found a given slide acceptable. Also pick two slides that the majority of participants found unacceptable or where just over 50 percent of the participants found a given slide unacceptable. Re-show these selected slides during the discussion.

Purpose: To discuss the process of how participants made their decisions on whether slides were acceptable or unacceptable. Also, to determine the length of time and number of days that the visibility levels could be endured by the participants for particular visibility level.

Questions:

- < Here is a slide that ___ (some percentage) of you said was ____ (acceptable/unacceptable). Why did you react to this slide in the way you did?
- < When you were giving your opinions about visibility, were you thinking about other environmental problems? Like what? Why or why not?
- < How did you decide what time period it would take for a view to be unacceptable?