

CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION

**SUSAN CURRY**

RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND ACTION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH  
IN AMBLER (REACH Ambler)

Transcript of an Interview  
Conducted by

Lee Sullivan Berry

at

Susan Curry's home  
Ambler, Pennsylvania

on

20 December 2013

(With Subsequent Corrections and Additions)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This oral history was conducted as part of a joint project of the Chemical Heritage Foundation and the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. This project was supported by the Office of the Director, National Institutes of Health under Award Number R25OD010521-01.



THE CHEMICAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
Center for Oral History

**Title of the Research Study:** Resources for Education and Action for Community Health in Ambler

**Protocol Number:** 817669

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## ABSTRACT

**Susan Curry** moved to Ambler, Pennsylvania in 1998. Wanting to live sustainably, she joined Alliance for a Sustainable Future, took a master's degree in environmental studies and psychology, and joined the newly founded Ambler Environmental Advisory Council (EAC), a committee appointed by the Borough of Ambler Council. This prompted her attendance at Borough Council meetings. She also won a grant to develop policies to manage the care of the trees downtown.

Curry moved to Ambler just as a five-year review by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of the remediated asbestos piles found everything all right. She had not previously been aware of the asbestos hazard. She feels she lives too far from the piles to be affected, and asbestos-caused diseases are too slow-growing to harm her. She worries about demolition of the Borough's remaining older buildings, which have asbestos siding. Curry talks about her role in the establishment of the community advisory group (CAG) when the EPA listed the BoRit Superfund site on the National Priorities List, and she explains the structure and workings of the CAG.

Curry describes the CAG meetings, with their occasional disputes among the different interests represented. She believes that most people are not sure there even is a risk from the asbestos; others feel that every fiber must be removed entirely; the West Ambler citizens, closest to the piles, generally do not attend meetings. To complicate matters, there is apparently a change in the science regarding asbestos fibers.

Curry thinks the EPA's hundred-year-storm standard for remediation is not adequate; she wants EPA to use a five-hundred-year storm standard. She had belonged to the Removal and Remedial Monitoring workgroup of the CAG and thinks that they should be requiring the EPA to test the ground under the pond, which is now having the water removed and cleaned, for all kinds of toxic substances. She praises Salvatore Boccuti's aerial photos of the site; information is also available from the EPA's weekly reports; from the on-site coordinator, Eduardo Rovira; and from the website. Her ambition to produce another report from the CAG was rebuffed.

The Ambler movie theater renovation was the big attraction for Curry. She agrees that the town is vibrant; in fact, parking is a problem now. All of this is a result of good community efforts and strong local leaders, like the current Borough Manager. She believes asbestos is not a concern for most people. She hopes for progressives on the Borough Council. Curry wants Ambler to be a self-sustaining community.

Asked what lessons Ambler has for other communities, Curry stresses the importance of establishing a CAG, getting aerial photos, demanding quarterly tours of the remediation. Communities should research previous Superfund sites. Be sure the EPA does not define too small an area for the site boundaries. Make use of Technical Assistance Services for Communities (TASC) for gathering and interpreting information. Curry finishes her interview with a few more thoughts about Ambler's experience, a few more worries about DEP's permitting process, and a lot more hopes for an increase in the Borough Council's interest and role.

## **INTERVIEWER**

**Lee Sullivan Berry** earned a master's degree in medieval studies from the University of Notre Dame, and a bachelor of arts degree in religious studies from the University of Pennsylvania. As a staff member in the Center for Oral History, Berry conducts background research and oral-history interviews, edits transcripts of completed interviews, and coordinates with interviewers and interviewees to finalize transcripts. She was the lead interviewer for the REACH Ambler project and has presented her work at meetings of the American Society for Environmental History and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

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