13 May 2015

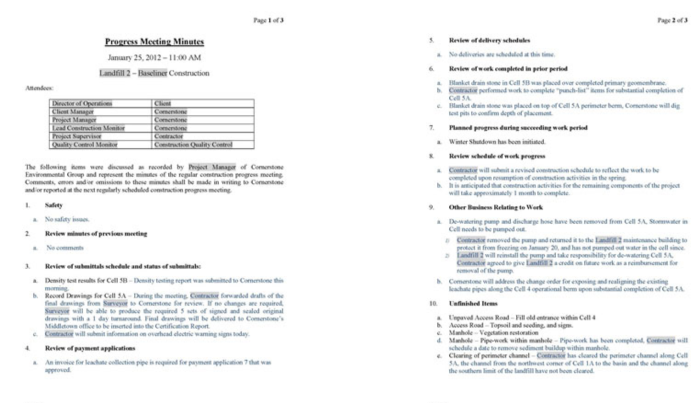
Tips for getting the most from construction meeting minutes

As an engineer, I attend more than my fair share of construction meetings, and I wanted to pass along a few tips for documenting – in writing – what goes on at these meetings.

Are you reading this thinking, "Writing minutes is a boring exercise with no real purpose, and I can do it at my convenience."? Think again! If there ever is a dispute (it does happen), the meeting minutes are considered part of the official project record and are often requested by the attorneys involved on both sides of the dispute. So, always consider the possibility that the minutes will be used in a court of law – both when you are speaking and when preparing the meeting minutes.

What should be included?

You can use a variety of formats (I've provided a screen shot of a format I've found well), but be sure to include:



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Progress Meeting Minutes

January 25, 2012 – 11:00 AM

Landfill 2 – Baseliner Construction

Attendees:

Director of Operations	Client
Client Manager	Cornerstone
Project Manager	Cornerstone
Lead Construction Monitor	Cornerstone
Project Supervisor	Contractor
Quality Control Monitor	Construction Quality Control

The following items were discussed as recorded by Project Manager of Cornerstone Environmental Group and represent the minutes of the regular construction progress meeting. Comments, errors and/or omissions to these minutes shall be made in writing to Cornerstone and/or reported at the next regularly scheduled construction progress meeting.

1. **Safety**
   a. No safety issues.
2. **Review minutes of previous meeting**
   a. No comments
3. **Review of submittals schedule and status of submittals:**
   a. Density test results for Cell 5B – Density testing report was submitted to Cornerstone this morning.
   b. Record Drawings for Cell 5A – During the meeting, Contractor forwarded drafts of the final drawings from Surveyor to Cornerstone for review. If no changes are required, Surveyor will be able to produce the required 5 sets of signed and sealed original drawings with a 1 day turnaround. Final drawings will be delivered to Cornerstone's Middletown office to be inserted into the Certification Report.
   c. Contractor will submit information on overhead electric warning signs today.
4. **Review of payment applications**
   a. An invoice for leachate collection pipe is required for payment application 7 that was approved.

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5. **Review of delivery schedules**
   a. No deliveries are scheduled at this time.
6. **Review of work completed in prior period**
   a. Blanket drain stone in Cell 5B was placed over completed primary geomembrane.
   b. Contractor performed work to complete "punch-list" items for substantial completion of Cell 5A.
   c. Blanket drain stone was placed on top of Cell 5A perimeter berm, Cornerstone will dig test pits to confirm depth of placement.
7. **Planned progress during succeeding work period**
   a. Winter Shutdown has been initiated.
8. **Review schedule of work progress**
   a. Contractor will submit a revised construction schedule to reflect the work to be completed upon resumption of construction activities in the spring.
   b. It is anticipated that construction activities for the remaining components of the project will take approximately 1 month to complete.
9. **Other Business Relating to Work**
   a. De-watering pump and discharge hose have been removed from Cell 5A, Stormwater in Cell needs to be pumped out.
      1) Contractor removed the pump and returned it to the Landfill 2 maintenance building to protect it from freezing on January 20, and has not pumped out water in the cell since.
      2) Landfill 2 will reinstall the pump and take responsibility for de-watering Cell 5A, Contractor agreed to give Landfill 2 a credit on future work as a reimbursement for removal of the pump.
   b. Cornerstone will address the change order for exposing and realigning the existing leachate pipes along the Cell 4 operational berm upon substantial completion of Cell 5A.
10. **Unfinished Items**
   a. Unpaved Access Road – Fill old entrance within Cell 4
   b. Access Road – Topsoil and seeding, and signs.
   c. Manhole – Vegetation restoration
   d. Manhole – Pipe-work within manhole – Pipe-work has been completed, Contractor will schedule a date to remove sediment buildup within manhole.
   e. Clearing of perimeter channel – Contractor has cleared the perimeter channel along Cell 5A, the channel from the northwest corner of Cell 1A to the basin and the channel along the southern limit of the landfill have not been cleared.

File Path

- Name of the project
- Meeting date, time, and location
- List of attendees and the company/organization they represent
- Statement of who prepared the minutes
- Record of the meeting: scope, schedule, budget (if applicable)
- Time and date of next meeting
- Record of any project-related discussions that took place after the meeting ended and a list of those attending the discussion. These discussions should be documented at the next construction meeting. (*Special note*: Any conflicts that arise after the meeting adjourned should be addressed through additional meetings, phone calls, or email as needed to resolve the conflict.)

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Dos and don'ts when preparing minutes

Prepare as soon as possible – Write the minutes within a day or two of the meeting, while topics are still fresh in your memory and those of others sitting around the table at the meeting. It's much easier to resolve different recollections of what was said soon after a meeting than to wait a week or a month and then try to recall. A lawyer could call into question meeting minutes that were not completed in a timely manner.

Include enough detail – Meeting minutes should contain the substance of the meeting in sufficient detail such that a person who did not attend the meeting will know what occurred in the meeting. Be sure your minutes are factual; do not speculate. One related tip – rather than using a person's name in the narrative on a topic, consider referring to the person by their role. ("The Contractor stated," rather than "Steve stated").

Be careful of language used – Don't use abbreviations or be sure to define them first – does CM mean Construction Monitor or Construction Manager? Be careful what words and titles you use. When performing construction quality assurance (CQA), field personnel are Construction Monitors or Observers, not Inspectors or Managers, which hold a specific legal connotation. If you're near the end of a project, don't use the term "punch list" if you mean "list of things that need to be done." Each of these has a specific legal meaning.

Avoid so-called liability language – For example: all, all inclusive, any, best, comprehensive, determine, ensure/insure/assure, every, warrant. (I have a really long list; feel free to email me if you would like a copy).

Follow note-taking best practices – Gather all notes taken by others from your company who attended the meeting. Incorporating them into the minutes can really help flesh out the discussion and make your minutes as complete as possible. Maintain the pace of the meeting to allow for note taking; ask for time to take notes if you're not the one running the meeting. If needed, speak up and ask for clarification or for the speakers to repeat themselves to get accurate notes.

Reviewing meeting minutes

Meeting minutes should be distributed to all meeting attendees and involved parties, but before doing so, it is really important to get a thorough in-house review of the minutes. I always send minutes first to everyone from my company who attended the meeting so they can weigh in on whether I was accurate.

Once you have the draft minutes, send them out to the entire group. Discussion of the draft minutes should be the first agenda item at the next meeting. Take the time to hash out any suggested changes and adjustments. Decide if you need to make a change or simple clarification. If you find an error or omission issue corrected minutes, or note the correction in the following meeting's minutes.

Remember, just because someone does not agree with the meeting minutes does not mean there is an error. Sometimes, what the person actually said was not what they meant – In that case, the meeting minutes will stay the same, but you can include a clarification statement indicating that the party has changed their response.

If the commenter does not agree with the group's recollection of the event, then a statement may be added to the meeting minutes that indicates that the commenter has objected to an item but the objection is not supported by the others in attendance. This item should then be further discussed until resolution is found; the resolution should be included in the meeting minutes

As noted earlier, the quicker you prepare and send the minutes, the easier it will be for others to affirm the language you've put in the minutes.

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