Removals, Emergency Response, & The Pandemic

ASTSWMO Removals and Emergency Response Focus Group

ASTSWMO Superfund and Brownfields Symposium

Des Moines, IA

August 9, 2022

Agenda

- Research Tool Goal
- Who Did We Ask and Who Responded
- Response Data
- Common Themes, Impacts and Outcomes
- Case Study
- Conclusion

Research Tool Goal

Determine how States and Territories (States) manage environmental cleanups during COVID and
How a field-restricted EPA was able to interact with States for Removals (time-critical or not) and CERCLA Removals.

Project: Covid-19 & Removals/Emergency Work

What

A study of State Programs and response to the Pandemic, and how it affected their work

Why

A way to gauge State's response to catastrophic widespread natural disasters

Importance

Understanding what works and what didn't, can help States and EPA counterparts plan for the future

Impact

How did lockdowns, Contractor restrictions, and Federal restrictions impact work?

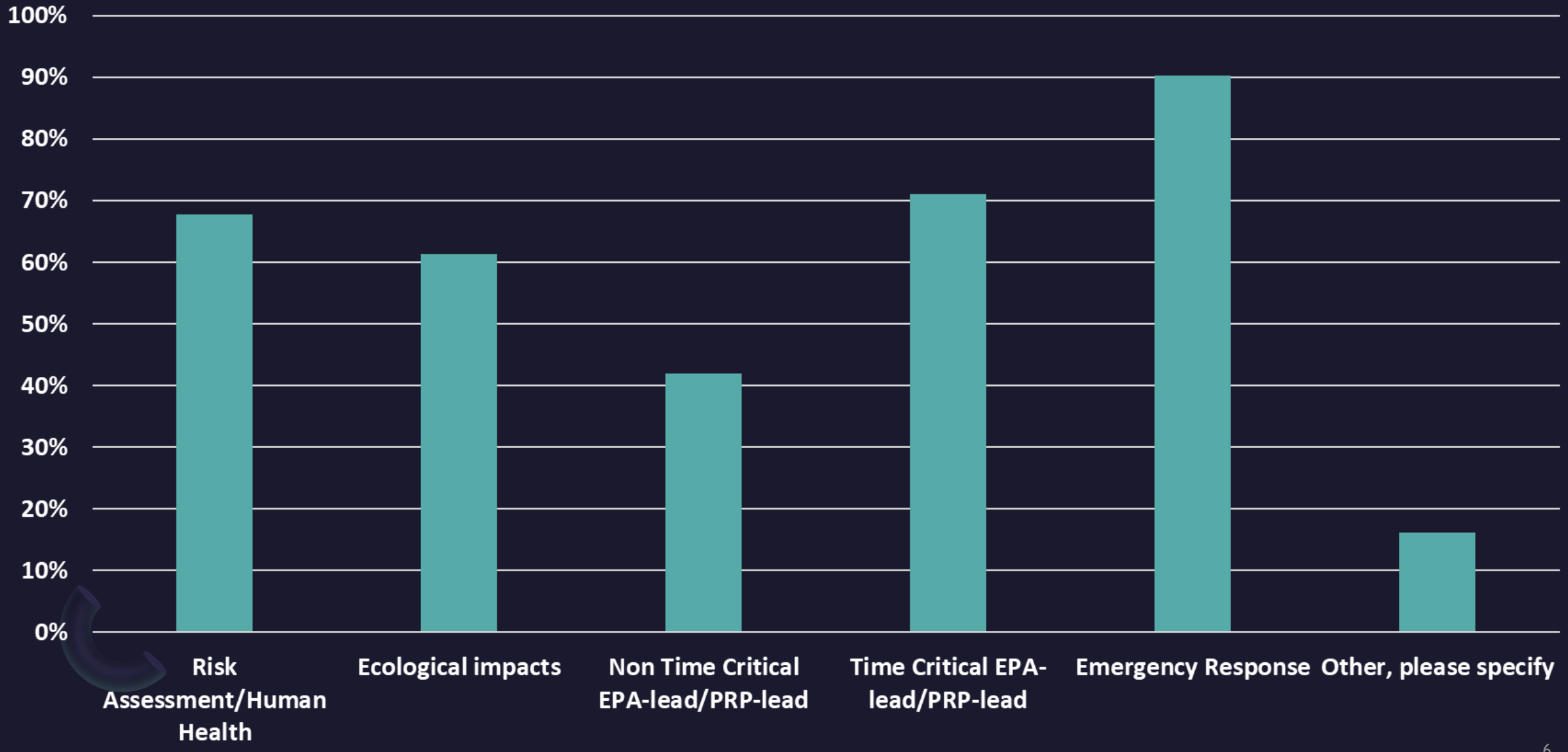
Who did we ask, and Who Responded?

31 respondents across the US

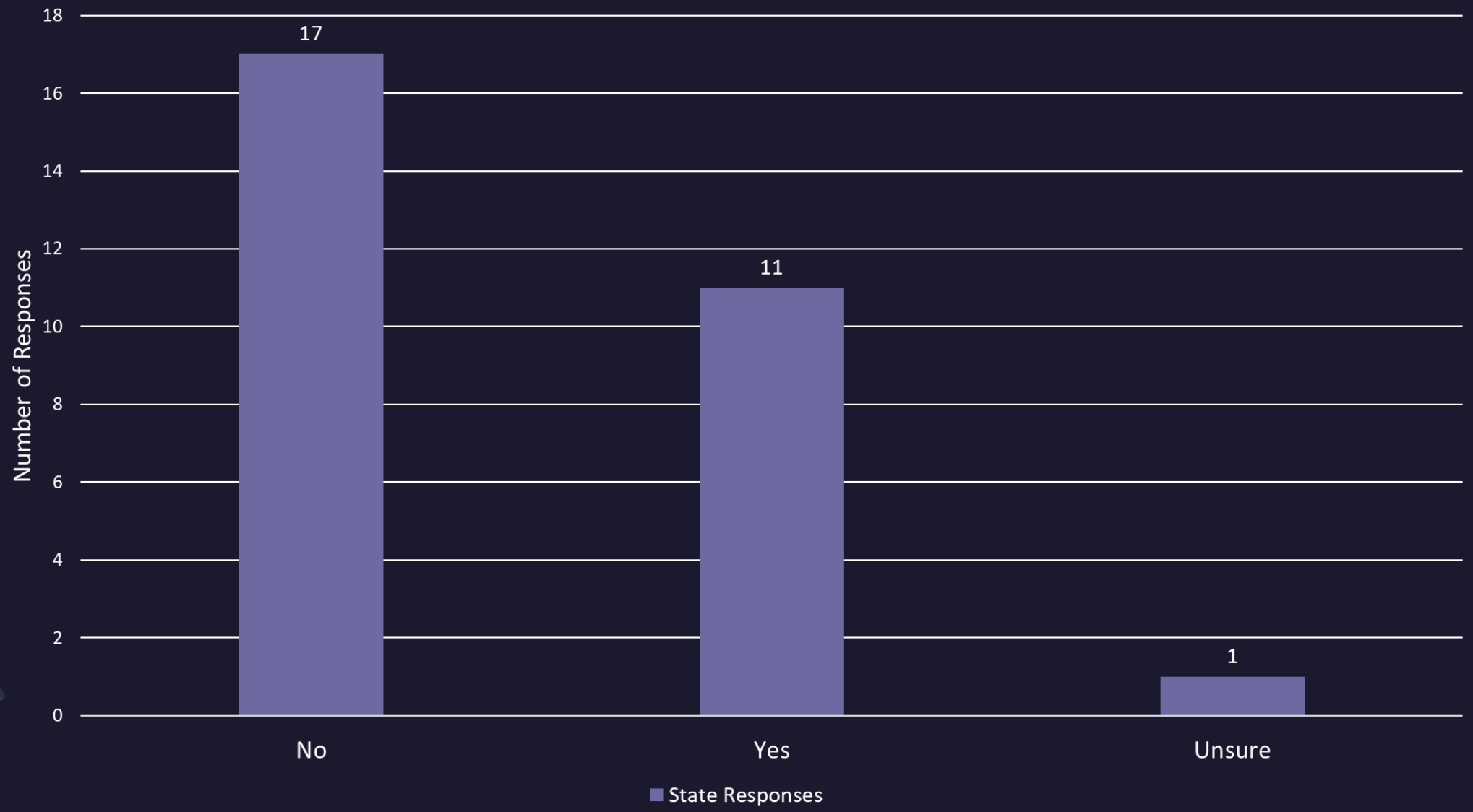
From all 10 Regions

With the focus solely on States' capacity.

Which Topics Were Considered Essential?



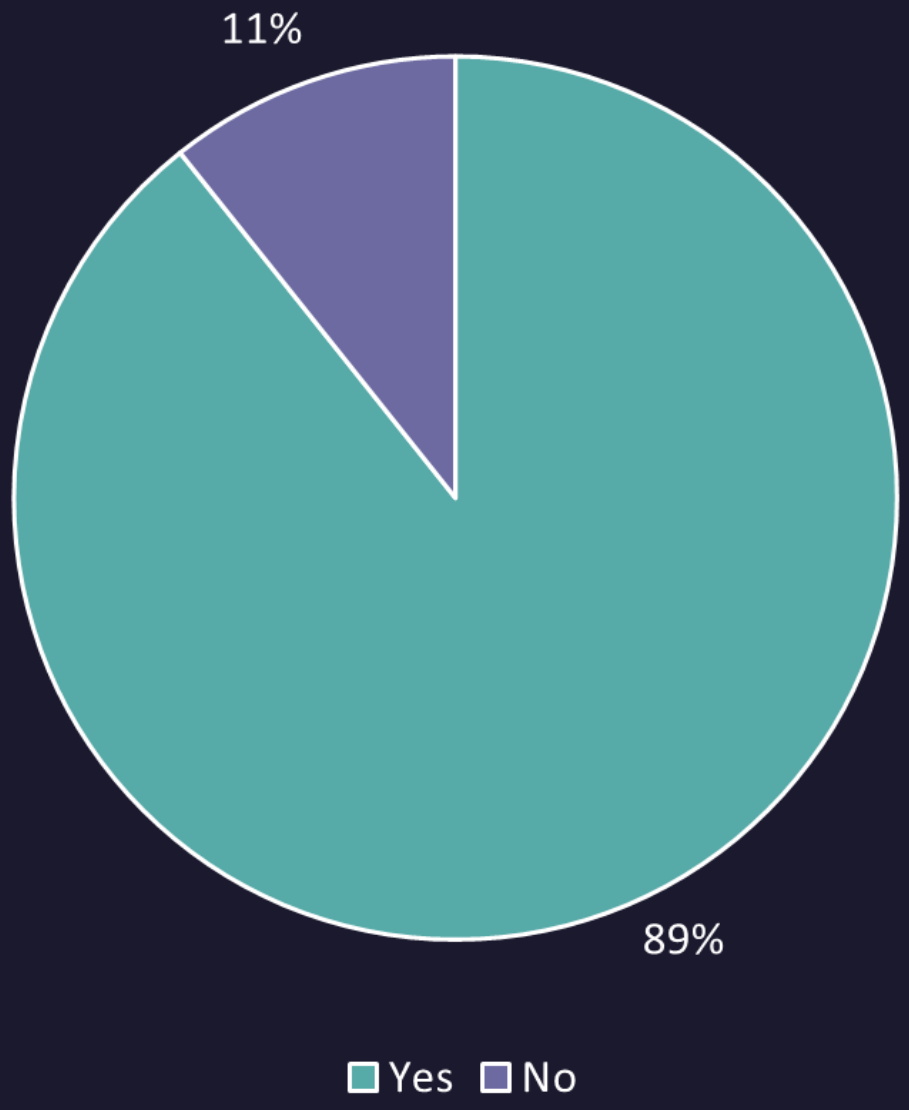
Were Sites Prioritized/Managed Differently Than Before the Pandemic?



How were sites prioritized differently

- Breakdown of open response dealing with prioritization

Were Site-Specific Protocols Developed for Working through Covid-19 Restrictions?



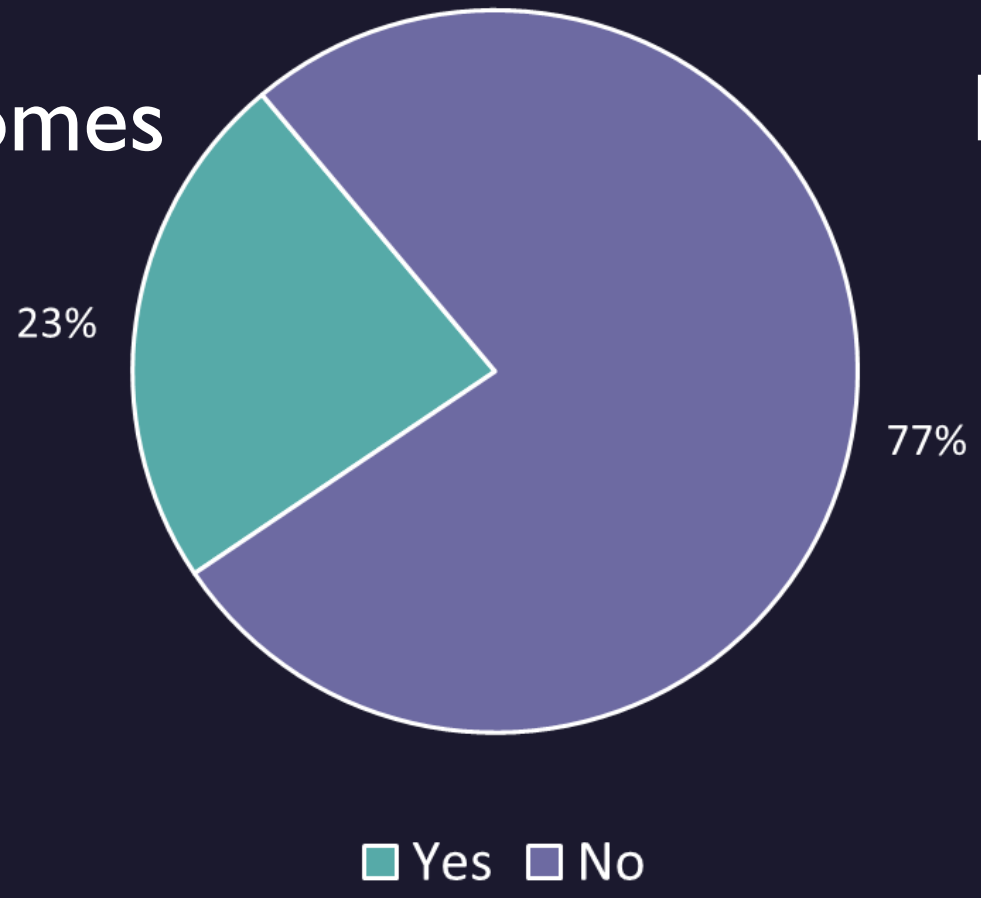
Protocols

- General CDC, State and Local Guidelines
  - Social Distancing, Masks, use of Sanitizers, Health questionnaires, and temperature checks
- Site Specific Protocols were developed
  - Project specific protocols to conduct work safely following CDC and State guidance
  - One person per vehicle, decon after use, allowed to use personal vehicle for site visits
  - Policy documents and Contingency plans updated

Did Regional EPA Restrictions Impact Removals/Emergency Actions? If so, how?

Negative Outcomes

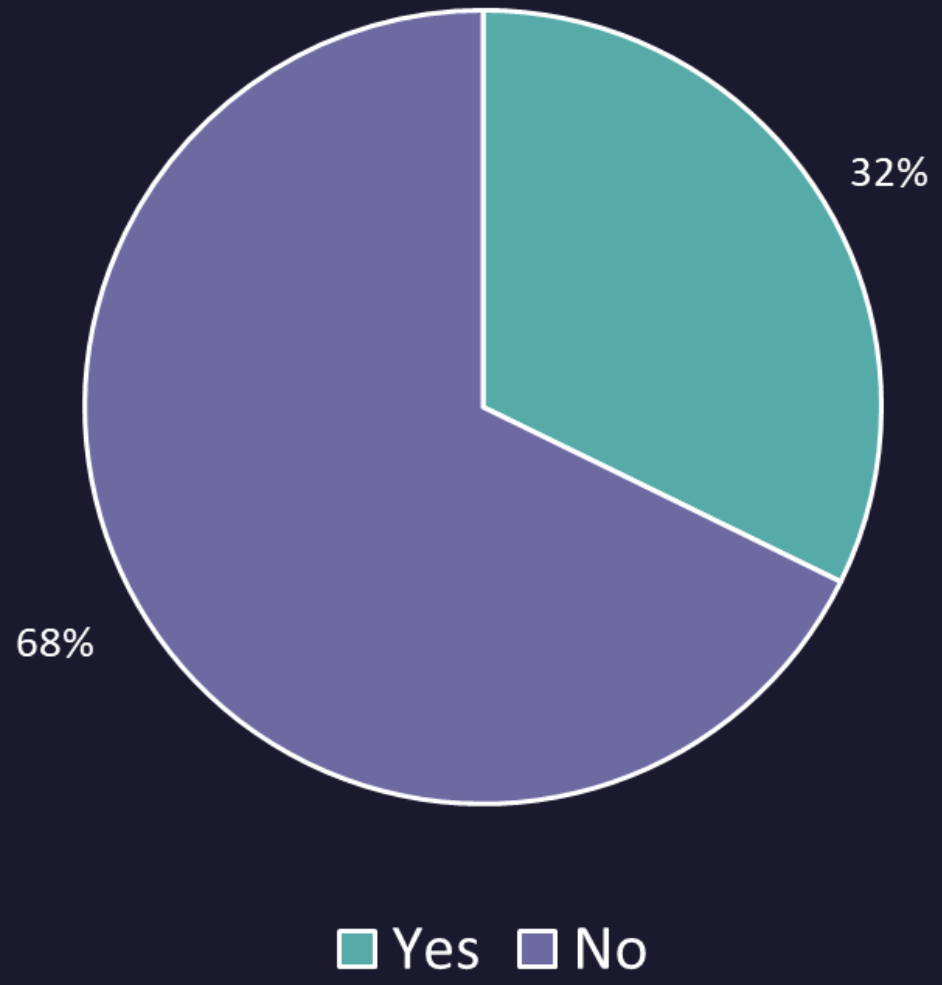
- Travel Restrictions
- Delays



Positive Outcomes

- Virtual Meetings
- Frequent Communication with EPA

Were State Activities Impacted?

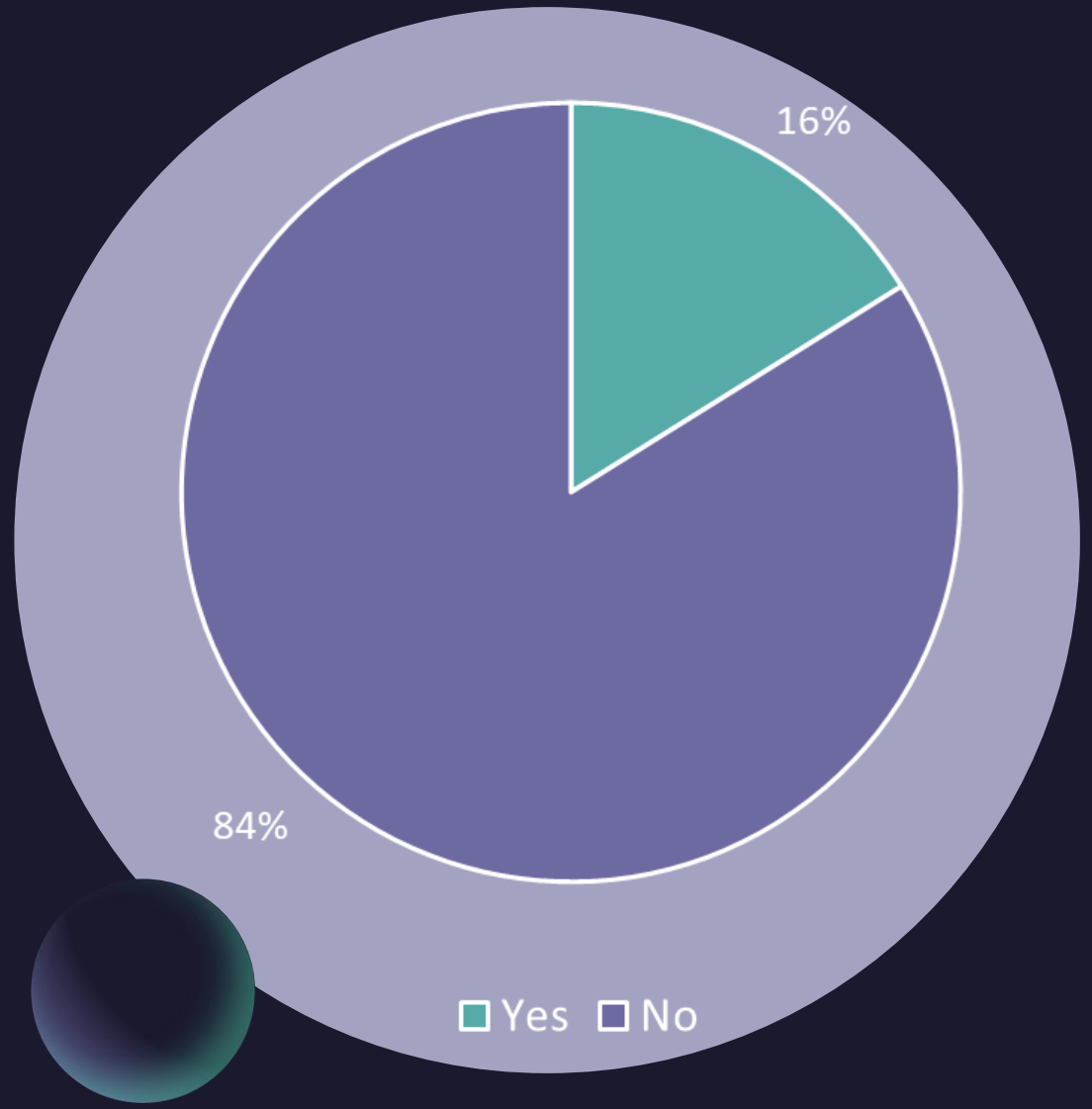


Differences between PRP Lead vs. Fund-Lead projects?

- 77% answered "No differences"
- PRP-lead delays due to less income, adapting to protocols
- More use of State response due to PRP delays
- State-lead delays due to travel restrictions and supply chain shortages

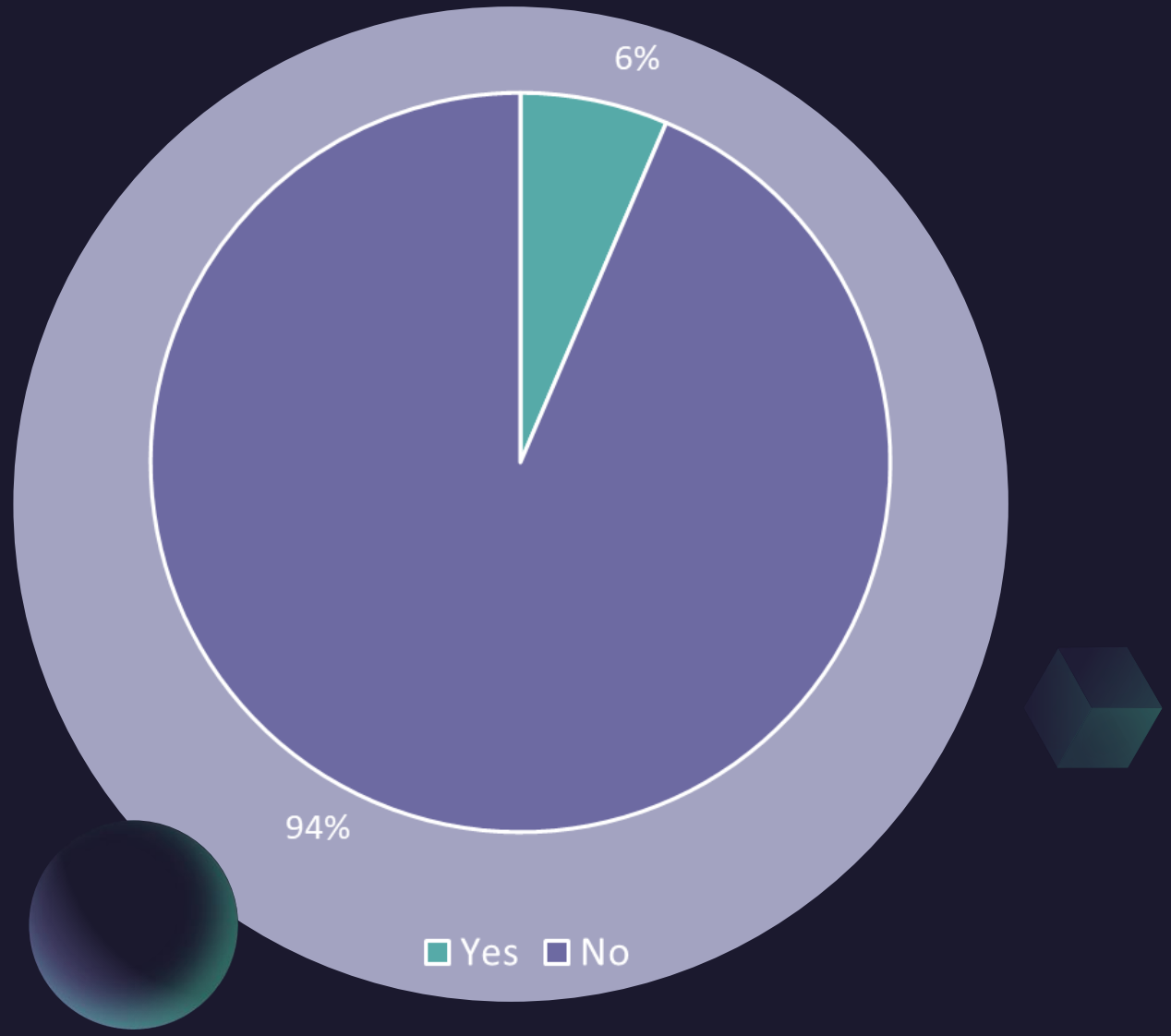
Engineering Controls

- Did Covid Restrictions Impact Engineering Controls at sites in your State?



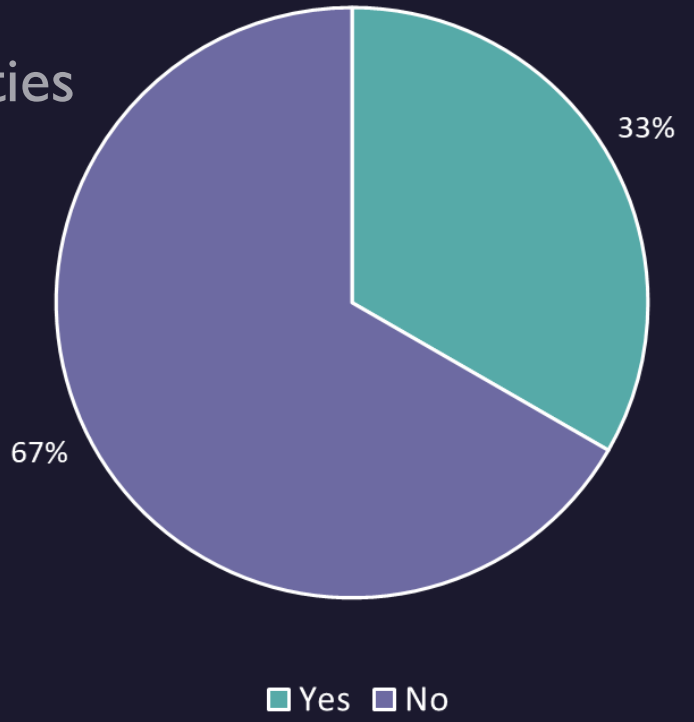
Institutional Controls

- Were there issues with Institutional Controls?



Operation & Maintenance

Were O&M activities Impacted?



If yes, How?

- Intervals extended
- Lack of training for staff/inspectors
- Delay in site inspections (community or federal partner restrictions)
- Supply chain and staff shortages
- PPE needs

Open Response Review

Common Themes

THE ENVIRONMENT IS ESSENTIAL

➢Essential services continued:

- Emergency Response
- Time Critical EPA-Lead/PRP-Lead Removals
- Risk Assessments, Human Health, Ecological Impacts
- Non-Time Critical EPA-Lead/PRP-Lead Removals
- UST Installation
- Enforcement

WORKFLOW MATTERS

- 100% of respondents were able to continue cleanup and remedial work
- Prioritizing responses based on impacts to human health and the environment

Impacts

➢ *Contractor & State impacts*

- Covid cases - not working
- Workforce retirements & hiring freezes
- EPA and State trainings
- Increase in administrative tasks & ensuring protocols followed
- Supply chain shortages and delays impacted all schedules and costs

Outcomes

- *Implementation Challenges*
  - Technology constraints
  - Inspections (virtual or onsite)
  - Following COVID protocols
- *Regulatory Accommodations*
  - Sampling
  - Inspections Delayed
  - Reporting Schedules

- *Innovations*
  - Virtual Inspections
  - Staff working remotely
    - Technology and applications to be able to work from home
      - Accepting electronic submittals and platforms

Case Study

- NH? Dave will reach out to respondent
- WI: Add Info

Batteries Electronic Recycling Inc. (BERI) Removal

- Time Critical Response - March 2, 2020.
- Two-month delay after stay-at-home order
- COVID protocols were put in place
  - Frequent COVID testing – positive test results sent the entire crew into quarantine, delaying work for a week at a time.
- Added workload
  - Daily COVID screenings and briefings
  - Frequent disinfection/cleaning procedures

[Battery and Electronics Recycling Inc. | US EPA]

Conclusions

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If you would like to add input to our next project, please scan the QR code below