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The Daily Courier

9/5/2011 10:00:00 PM

EPA plans partial Superfund clean-up of contaminated soil this fall; Dewey-Humboldt residents worry about human contamination, too



Matt Hinshaw/The Daily Courier
Monika O'Sullivan, left, Superfund Remedial Project Manager, Margot Perez-Sullivan, a Public Information Officer with the EPA, and Jeff Dhont, also a Superfund Remedial Project Manager, talk about the future clean-up of the Iron King Mine and the Humboldt Smelter Tuesday afternoon while touring the sites in Dewey-Humboldt.



Matt Hinshaw/The Daily Courier
This yellow-orange pile is the largest toxic tailings pile at the Iron King Mine and Humboldt Smelter Superfund site, at 6.4 million cubic yards. The EPA will be adding cover to this Iron King Mine site in Dewey-Humboldt to reduce blowing dust hazards as part of an interim clean-up project this fall, while work on a larger clean-up plan continues.

EPA plans work at Superfund site this fall

The Superfund contaminants at Dewey-Humboldt emanate from the defunct 182-acre Humboldt Smelter and nearby defunct 153-acre Iron King Mine. The EPA declared them a Superfund site in 2008.

Both sites sit at the top of gulches, where contaminants including arsenic and lead have washed down to other

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DEWEY-HUMBOLDT -

Environmental Protection Agency officials are scheduled to conduct interim Superfund cleanup activities at some of the worst areas in Dewey-Humboldt for seven weeks beginning Sept. 12.

The EPA expects to issue a study by the end of 2012 that contains several long-term clean-up options for the entire Superfund site, seek public comment on it, then issue a final plan in 2013.

EPA officials also plan to sample soil from more yards this fall and winter, so they can get a better handle on natural levels of arsenic compared to unnatural levels caused by former mining activities on the Superfund site.

Since 2006 the EPA has sampled soil from 207 yards that sit below millions of cubic yards of toxic mine tailings left at the two former mine and smelter sites that make up the Superfund site. The EPA cleared soil from four of those yards so far.

But no government agency has tested any people, and that has some residents upset.

Several local residents complained to EPA officials at a community meeting this past week that they have no idea how people have been affected by the massive piles of mine tailings at the smelter and mine that have eroded down onto other properties including yards.

"I think it's time for someone to come to town and worry about people, not dirt," Dewey-Humboldt resident Ashley Preston said, prompting loud audience applause at the meeting in the elementary school auditorium Wednesday.

She charged that her daughter has suffered health problems because of toxic dust in the air, and she knows at least six other children who have similar problems. "If I had a choice to get out of here, I'd leave in five seconds," Preston said.

properties over the years - especially in 1967 when a major breach occurred on the largest Iron King mine tailings pile that contains 6.4 million cubic yards of tailings piled on 53 acres.

Two years later the mine stopped digging up gold, silver, lead, copper and zinc after 63 years of operation, mostly by the defunct Shattuck Denn Mining Co. The site now is covered with yellow-orange tailings.

The 182-acre Humboldt Smelter operated from the late 1800s to the 1960s, processing ore for 67 mines in the region. It contains a pile with 185,000 cubic yards of tailings. Another 417,000 cubic yards of tailings washed down into Chaparral Gulch and, below that, yet another 18,000 cubic yards of tailings is held back by an aging dam just above the Agua Fria River. EPA officials said they have not tested the stability of the dam or determined whether tailings wash over it during heavy rains.

The EPA plans to conduct the following activities on the Superfund site during September and October, on-scene coordinator Craig Benson said:

- Clear 1-2 feet of topsoil from 10 yards and replace it with clean topsoil. The EPA hasn't found any contamination below one foot in the yards, he said.
- Move a 20,000-cubic-yard tailings pile back to the Iron King mine after it washed down into a drainage on neighboring property.
- Place dust suppression materials on a 250,000-cubic-yard ash pile that hangs on a steep slope above the Agua Fria River at the Humboldt Smelter site. The property owner placed sealant on the ash pile last year but it lasts only about a year.
- Place more soil and wood chips on part of the largest tailings pile at the Iron King Mine to augment dust control work the property owner already did.



"This is scary," D-H resident Kimberly Bullock added. "Someone better start looking at children in this area."

The EPA clean-up is taking place to prevent future human health problems, EPA Project Manager Jeff Dhont responded. Human health issues related to Superfund sites are under the purview of the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), he added. That agency can set up on-site blood tests, he said.

Treesha deFrance, chair of the Town of Dewey-Humboldt's Environmental Issues Advisory Committee, said she already had asked the ATSDR for help.

Residents at Wednesday's meeting repeatedly asked for a meeting with ATSDR. EPA officials said they invited ATSDR officials to Wednesday's meeting but they were unable to attend. Arizona Department of Health Services officials were there, but they apparently have not been involved in any testing either.

The [University of Arizona](#) is embarking on a new study of how toxins blowing in the air could affect residents, deFrance added.

Bullock said she's fearful about what the EPA might stir up in the air when it moves a tailings pile and clears the topsoil from 10 yards this fall. EPA officials said they will keep down dust by spraying water on the areas while working, and cover loads of dirt and tailings during transportation.

Several people asked EPA officials what levels of arsenic and other toxins are dangerous to humans, but Dhont said EPA has no "magic" level because it depends on the level and time period of exposure.

During a site tour the previous day, Dhont roughly estimated that the mine sites are 10 times more toxic than the most toxic yards below them, and those yards are about 10 times more toxic than the average yard. The worst yards have levels of arsenic at about 600 parts per million, EPA officials said.

Residents at Wednesday's meeting also expressed concern about the lack of fencing on the mine and smelter sites, which are privately owned by several people and corporations.

Teens play in the smelter buildings and crawl into old mine shafts along the Agua Fria River all the time, Preston said. The EPA has found elevated levels of arsenic and lead on the river's banks that exceed soil standards.

While a 1.7-million-cubic-foot pile of mine slag that hangs on a steep slope of the smelter site above the river is basically an inert pile of hardened soil, chunks could fall off, Dhont said.

A 250,000-cubic-yard pile of ash containing arsenic and lead also sits on that steep slope. The EPA plans to apply materials to the ash pile this fall that will help hold it in place.

Preston cited the death of a local 2-year-old boy, who wandered onto the Iron King site last year while his mother was napping and apparently became stuck in a muddy sludge pit.

Her little brother almost fell into a deep shaft on the Iron King property, Preston added.

Dhont agreed that children have been playing on a 20,000-cubic-yard pile of Iron King Mine

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tailings that have washed down into a drainage on neighboring property, and that's why the EPA is moving that pile back up to the mine site this fall.

The real culprits are the companies that pollute this country, resident Bart Brush said.

"You can hear federal officials say, 'We need fewer regulations,'" he added. "We pick up the tab."

EPA officials have not yet determined whether they will be able to get past and current property owners to help pay for the clean-up costs. The current property owners include Dewey-Humboldt Mayor Terry Nolan.



Reader Comments

Posted: Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Article comment by: **Ashley Preston**

People amaze me...Please explain to me how you would better do it..are you willing to trade your house for mine?? Are we supposed to walk away from our paid off house and live on the street? Are we supposed to stay here when we know our kids will have cancer by the time they are adults? Home equity loan maybe? We have tried that by the way..we can't get one because we live .2 miles away from a superfund site! Do you think we would have bought here if someone would have told us? Do you think my neighbor, who bought less then a year ago would have bought here had he been told? His arsenic levels are high also, ..and they are here only on the weekends!! So you tell me, if you KNEW that something was causing your child to

be hospitalized for 5 days at a time...Where would you stop? What is your child worth???

Posted: Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Article comment by: **I'm wondering**

If people are staying because they can only get pennies for their home, then I'm just wondering how many more pennies they are waiting for until it seems worth it? What is the health of a child going for these days?

Posted: Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Article comment by: **Ashley Preston**

For those who are stuck like We are, please email me and I can tell you how we can get something out of our homes..I have checked and done my research, and there is only one option. ash_wylie@.com

Posted: Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Article comment by: **Home Owner**

I too am one of the home owners in the Iron King mine area. I bought my house in 2008...and NO ONE mentioned the contamination to me. I can't believe that it wasn't illegal for the seller to not disclose this info to me. Now, as many other people are STUCK into staying here in this filth. There's no way anyone is going to want to buy my house now...and not like I could sell it anyways with what it's worth since being deemed a superfund! What's in it for us? As much as I want them to clean it up, as other people stated before it's just going to kick up a bunch of the poisoned tailings and throw them in my direction. I came to this town because it was off the beaten path...because it seemed like a place I wanted to raise children....because it seemed perfect. Little did I know. I feel betrayed....I feel sad because now I don't even want to bring children into my home...which is in this town...in which I am stuck. Where's the justice for US...the betrayed people of Humboldt! I am so mad I bought a house here!

Posted: Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Article comment by: **Ashley Preston**

I have had both of my children tested! On my own! My daughter had very high levels of Arsenic, Beryllium, and Lead in her system. My son had Lead..and we don't drink the water, so please tell me how I can lower their heavy metal levels? I have pictures of the dust blowing so bad that you can't even see the town of Humboldt. I have EPA's air sample results, and they are unbelievable. They claim the school is okay, but their air is just as bad as if you were standing on either the smelter or the iron king mine. I know that my daughter is never sick unless we are in Humboldt, and she was NEVER sick until we moved here. EPA claims that arsenic is the worst that is here, but I encourage all of you to look up Beryllium and see if it is something you would want in your child's system. There are a lot of sick people here, and every government agency would rather just turn their head. This is not a political issue..it has nothing to do with whether you are republican or democrat. It is simply that we still live in America, and you have the right to know if your kids or you are in danger! People are still allowed to buy here with no disclosure of contamination what so ever. Neither from the owners, or real estate. EPA has been testing here for 20 years..and there are still people in our community that have no idea what is going on. If we could sell our house and be gone we would. But that's the thing, if you bought here, you are truly stuck. It is now our responsibility to disclose this to the new buyers, and I am not willing to put another family and children in my nightmare. Besides, my house is only worth pennies now due to the contamination. More people need to be involved, and

like I said before, someone needs to worry about the people here...I know others are being tested also, and their results are coming out high in arsenic. If any one would like to see the pictures of the dust or air sample results, feel free to email me at ash_wylie@q.com

Posted: Wednesday, September 07, 2011

Article comment by: **open book**

Harry has hit the nail on the head. The EPA was initiated for a reason. Sick kids was one of them. Per the Republicans in Congress, the EPA is one of those "job-killing" departments that are on their list to close down. Check out working conditions in the off-shore facilities to be sure that you want those "job-killing" laws removed in our country, because those will then be the working conditions here for you and your children. Please put the actions in D.C. together with your personal health and safety when you make choices at the polls.

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **Hokas Pokas**

I know this may be considered a really way out idea, but has anybody ever had themselves or their child tested for toxic metal exposure? Or, do you folks just assume it must be the cause? The tests, privately and readily available, are not that expensive and, after all, if your life, or the life of a loved one really depends on it, why do you wait for the government to do something? It is possible to get it done your own. Ever thought about that?

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **Mrs. E**

I am sitting on contaminated land. Higher levels than anyone in the town of Humboldt. As a matter of fact the whole street I live on is contaminated. We are the Superfund site. We, among the other homeowners, are one of the residents on the clean up list. I bought my home back in 2004. I asked then if I could obtain a disclosure statement on the land due to its prior use, but I was told by my Real Estate Agent that I had no fear of contamination because "they" would not allow homes to be built on contaminated land. I am here to tell you that "they" did. It was disclosed to the buyer of the land from the BNSF Railroad, but it was not disclosed to the developer who bought the land from this other buyer. He gets off scott free? I think not. He should be held responsible. And those of us who are the original homeowners should be compensated. And since the health risks are unknown for short term and long term, our health care should be provided for free by this gentleman and his wife, and any trustee of his, now and in the future.

As far as the EPA, they are here to clean up a mess that has been here for a long time. They are not responsible for gaiting off the Iron King Mine, or covering mine shafts. The IKM owner's are responsible for fencing, and the State of Arizona has Arizona Department of Mining and an Inspector to address the mine shafts.

The EPA has put up warning and contamination signs restricting anyone from trespassing on the Superfund Site, yet people still go on the property. And it isn't just kids.

I hear the same concerns from the same person at every meeting regarding health. The thing is, no one can truly say that it is the Superfund site that is attributing to any health problems that are obtained short term. It is the long term affects that are a concern. I for one want to know if my family will be affected by living on the Superfund site? My home is right where the train transfer was. This is where they dumped the contaminants and whatever else into transportation trucks, and I live right on it. So far, thank God, no signs of any health risks, (that I know of) but who knows? If anyone were to be affected, it would be my family, my little boy, and other children living on this street.

I am thankful to the EPA for coming. Many of the town's people were against it. Some still are. What I would like to know is.....Why in 2004 when I bought my home, no one told me my land was contaminated Yet several entities knew? Makes you wonder why people turned their collective heads to the development of homes on a site that the state was already investigating. That is one of the reasons why the EPA stepped in. Just some little known facts.

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **The people that caused this**

should be held responsible for all costs associated with its clean up, not the taxpayers. This sort of thing happens too much and no one is held accountable. Way past time to put an immediate stop to it.

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **Clary Knowles**

So you accuse someone of "frothing at the mouth" and an "embarrassment to the party", but want everyone to know you "like clean air and water as much as the Dems". Just exactly what is your point? Perhaps reacting to a few of those votes you may have cast, and the real life results of those choices? Maybe your children are grown and moved away, so it's not your problem now is it. I might feel kind of embarrassed myself, if I were you.

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **TO: Give'm**

You froth at the mouth as though you have rabies! Republicans like clean water and air as much as Dems. You are a real embarrassment to the Dem. party and for that, I thank you!

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **Really Fed Up**

This is going on still in Prescott Valley. There is a major mining operation, asphalt plant, and a cement batch plant located right next to the StoneRidge and Prescott Country club developments. This pollutes the entire town of Prescott Valley, and dumps known cancer causing airborne contaminants all within 5 schools and 7 churches and four daycare centers. This is not to mention the chemicals and poisons it is flushing down stream towards Dewey and Mayer. This site is protected by the lobbying of PV planning and zoning and (the town). Give them a call ask them why they allow this to happen right in county land completely surrounded by the town of Prescott Valley. Better yet ask them who owns the land. They can annex the land into P.V. rezone it and stop this madness.

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **Ashley preston**

Thank you so much DC for writing an article on what is going on in our community, and approaching it from the citizens point of view! As a mother of a sick child, I know that more focus needs to be on the people! And I pray that at the next meeting EPA can actually bring someone with a little intelligence, who can answer the community's questions.

Posted: Tuesday, September 06, 2011

Article comment by: **Give'm Hell Harry**

The EPA is going to be killed off soon by the RepubliCONS so we can get back to the good old days when there were none of those "job killing regulations" to prevent these toxic sites. Quit your whining to the EPA and get used to it once the Tea Party gets these clowns elected because your problem and your sick kids don't matter to them. No more spending! How many of you have voted for them?

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