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## Dewey-Humbolt Residents Worry about What the Old Mine Has Left Behind



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The town of Dewey-Humboldt, just east of Prescott owes its existence to mining.

The mining and smelting operations there produced over one-hundred-million-dollars since the 1870s.

But the industry that was the town's lifeblood may now be responsible for making the residents sick.

Residents of Dewey-Humboldt gathered at the local elementary school last week.

They came to hear the latest on the Environmental Protection Agency's plans for the area.

The EPA's Jeff Dunt told residents the Agency is looking for "primary metals in tailings and ash on the site, you probably know this. Arsenic and lead are the main metals we look for, but we're also looking at copper and zinc. Copper and zinc are much less toxic."

Extracting gold, silver, and copper at local mines and smelting the material was the town's main source of income for 100 years.

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Image 1 of 5 ([view chat window](#))

The Humboldt Smelter sits just off of Main Street in Dewey-Humboldt. The smelter has been out of use since the 1960s, but toxic metals are still coming from the sites.

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Both the Iron King Mine and the Humboldt Smelter were shut down in the late '60s.

But the piles of dirt and residue left behind are now blowing into the lives of the residents.

The dust contains poisonous metals, which have now been found in drinking water, air, and soil.

The EPA did a study of the site back in 2002.

It listed the town as a super-fund site and began work in 2006.

Since then, the town has been the subject of several studies to determine the extent

of the problem and what to do about it.

And Robert Knowles of the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry said one thing has become clear. Residents are concerned about how much lead they might be ingesting.

"So one of the things that we're doing is that we're providing a blood-lead screening," said Knowles. "Because it was somewhat of a short notice to get this put together, we're going to offer another event in about a month where we'll come back and do the blood-lead screening again."

Residents at the meeting wanted to know when they can expect action.

Bart Brush and Ashley Preston said they're not only concerned for their health, they're worried about property values.

"I'd like to see a clean-up," said Brush. "Whenever the wind blows you can just see the dust coming off these two sites."

"It's just frustrating, especially having two young kids, not being able to sell your house," Preston added. "We're pretty much stuck where we are, breathing the dust. My kids are still playing in this dirt and breathing this air for how many more years."

"My concern about this is that when I bought my place just before this was declared a super-fund site, there was no disclosure from the owners and no disclosure from the realtor," Brush continued. "I didn't have a choice to buy my house and decide whether or not I wanted to take on those risks because it wasn't disclosed to me."

The matter has caught the attention of the Dewey-Humboldt's government. The town council has founded an Environmental Issues Advisory Committee. The Committee's chair, Treesha DeFrance, said the committee and the EPA "frequently, when they're in town have one-on-one with them where we can generate and ask a lot of questions that are probably more technical than the average citizen because we do study their reports and their work."

Raina Maier, director of the University of Arizona's Superfund Research Program sympathizes with the residents.

"They're really unsure about what having this tailings pile neighboring them means for their health, and they would like that explained to them in a way that they can understand," she said.

Future plans for residents include more thorough environmental testing, removing contaminated soil, and free blood testing for young children and pregnant women.

The EPA has yet to announce firm dates for further plans for cleaning up the super-fund site.

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