

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

MIDNITE MINE Wellpinit, Washington



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

October 2002

Summer is over already, and with the cooler weather and the shorter days comes a little reading material from EPA. This fact sheet will update you on EPA's study of Midnite Mine. But first, some thoughts:

Next time you visit the Tribal Center, take a look at the display outside the Tribal Business Council chambers. There is an aerial photo of Midnite Mine, some background information on the site, a list of people to contact, and some other visuals. We will try to keep a copy of the most current fact sheet available there as well.

In late July, John Iani, the head of the Region 10 office of EPA, visited the Spokane Reservation. After a meeting with the Tribal Business Council, he was taken on a short trip around the reservation to visit areas of environmental importance to the Spokane Tribe, including Midnite Mine. The visit was a great introduction to the Spokane Reservation and an opportunity to exchange information with the Council.

Come see the Radiation Scanner Van

Public Meeting on November 6, at the Longhouse, 4:30 - 6:30 p.m.

EPA is planning a public meeting this fall to update you on the site and to answer your questions. Our last public meeting was in October 2001, about a year ago.

Please come to the Longhouse on November 6 at 4:30 p.m. EPA's radiation scanner van will be there, if you would like to see how it works. We will continue to work with the Tribe's technical reviewers and governmental representatives throughout the study. EPA offers public meetings to ensure that anyone in the tribal community feels welcome to ask questions or raise concerns as we move toward a cleanup decision.



MIDNITE MINE: Looking down at Pit 3.

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Study Update

In 1999, EPA began a study of the environmental problems at Midnite Mine and possible cleanup alternatives. This study, called a "Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study" (RI/FS) is over halfway finished, and should be ready for public release in 2004.

Samples being Reviewed.

Samples collected in 1999, 2000 and 2001 were analyzed and, combined with existing data, are being reviewed to determine areas where Midnite Mine has affected water and sediments in streams (such as Blue Creek and mine drainages), shallow and deep ground water near the mine, and surface areas.

To define the affected areas, EPA has compared conditions at and near Midnite Mine to similar areas that have no evidence of mining impacts. The results will be reported this fall.

Health Risk Assessment to Reflect Tribal Lifestyle

EPA will assess the health risks posed by site contaminants to people who could one day live at or near Midnite Mine, or who may visit the mine and affected areas when doing traditional activities. To support the calculation of risk, it is necessary to make assumptions about the ways people may have contact with water, air, sediment, soil and foods and to estimate the amount of contact. We have worked closely with the Tribe to

describe these in a way that reflects the Tribal lifestyle. Stay tuned this winter for news that the report, called the Human Health Risk Assessment, is available for review.

An ecological risk assessment is also being planned.

EPA has taken an initial look at risk to aquatic organisms (such as frogs, fish and aquatic insects) and will consider risk to terrestrial birds and animals also, once the technical approach has been planned.

Feasibility Study to Analyze Cleanup Alternatives

Once the human and ecological risk assessments are finished and the site areas have been defined, EPA will begin a "Feasibility Study." This study will present cleanup alternatives and evaluate them against nine criteria.

The first two criteria are threshold criteria: alternatives must be protective of human health and the environment; and must comply with applicable or relevant and appropriate environmental requirements.

Five additional criteria are used to compare alternatives to each other: long-term effectiveness; short-term effectiveness; implementability; cost; and reduction of toxicity, mobility and volume through treatment.

The last two criteria are community acceptance and tribal acceptance. EPA will hold a public hearing and comment period to get comments on the alternatives, and will indicate which alternative EPA prefers. Based on the comments, EPA may modify its proposed plan before making a final cleanup decision.

EPA's Radiation Scanner Van Returns

You may remember that in late 1999 EPA staff drove a white truck very slowly along the Ford-Wellpinit Road to detect spilled ore and other radiation sources. The van will now travel along roads in other areas of the reservation selected by the Tribe and will re-scan the Ford-Wellpinit road where construction work took place last summer.

The Tribe and EPA hope information about the new areas will indicate whether radioactivity is a possible health risk. The van will be here for two or three days in early November. Roger Shura and James Harris, who operate the scanner, will be on hand at the public meeting to show you how it works.

Funding Update

EPA funds are being used to study environmental problems at Midnite Mine and develop cleanup alternatives. You may have heard about a shortage of money for Superfund projects. Studies at Midnite Mine and other sites are being scheduled carefully to ensure that as much priority work as possible can go forward with available funds. Sampling, laboratory analyses, and other major elements of the Midnite Mine RI/FS have already been completed. The Midnite Mine study will continue to be thorough and complete, and we hope to propose a cleanup decision in early 2004.

Reports Available

Recent reports EPA has issued may be of interest to you. The Spokane Tribal Natural Resources Department and other technical reviewers are reviewing drafts of several documents. These include the following:

- ***Initial hydrologic modeling results.*** These mathematical models estimate where the water is and the direction it is going. They can be used to predict how changes at the site may affect surface and groundwater flow – an important tool in choosing a cleanup method.
- ***Slope stability evaluation results.*** These show how data from the waste rock piles and open pit highwalls were assessed and conclude that slopes are stable under current conditions. This conclusion will be verified with periodic field inspections.
- ***Results of the statistical methods*** applied to background sample data. A comparison to background data will support the definition of mine-impacted areas.

Like other site documents, these reports are on file at the Spokane Tribal Natural Resources Department (*see Contact Information*).

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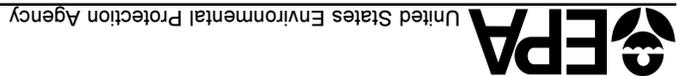
This fall, EPA will issue a plan for the human health risk assessment and start the step-by-step process to do the assessment. One of the first steps is developing a list of contaminants which may be of concern, including specific radioactive and heavy metals that are present at elevated levels. Work will continue on the Remedial Investigation, a report which describes the nature and extent of contamination, and a plan and schedule for the Feasibility Study will be developed.

To those who responded to our June 2001 survey, thank you! We asked for input on our level of community outreach, and the responses were wide ranging.

- **Public Meetings.** Many people felt we should have more public meetings, but almost the same number thought we should only involve the community at significant project milestones. EPA will try to hold two meetings a year at least, and will hold more meetings at significant project milestones or at the request of the community.
- **Technical Terms.** In general, people wanted more details about current and upcoming site activities, and thought defining technical terms was important. Fact sheets provide general updates. We will define technical terms in the fact sheets and at public meetings. We are happy to provide clarification or additional details at meetings or by phone (*see toll-free number in Contact Information*).
- **Mailings.** Most respondents preferred that fact sheets be sent via mail rather than e-mail. EPA will continue to send fact sheets and other written materials through the mail, and will also provide this information on our web page.

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Contact Information

EPA Contacts:

For technical questions about the site, please call:

Elly Hale, Project Manager at **(206) 553-1215**. E-mail: hale.ellie@epa.gov

For more information on the upcoming public meeting or how to become involved, please call:

Debra Sherbina, Community Involvement Coordinator at **(206) 553-0247**

E-mail: sherbina.debra@epa.gov

You may also reach EPA through our toll free number: **1-800-424-4372**

Spokane Tribe:

Randy Connolly coordinates EPA-Tribe communications on Midnite Mine and two other Superfund projects of interest to the Spokane Tribe. **Randy maintains a file of project documents accessible to the public at the Tribal Natural Resources Department.** Contact Randy by calling **(509) 258-7709, extension 13**. E-mail: connolly@spokanetribe.com

EPA's Internet homepage: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth>

A web page has been developed for the Midnite Mine Site. Go to the main EPA webpage, click on "Index," then click on "M" and scroll down to find "Midnite Mine."

For people with disabilities: please call Debra Sherbina at 206-553-0247 (toll-free 1-800-424-4372) if you have any special requests for reasonable accommodations. For TTY users: please call the Federal Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339 and give the operator Debra Sherbina's phone number.