



Fall of 1999

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PLAN

### Midnite Mine Superfund Site Wellpinit, Washington

This Community Involvement Plan identifies community concerns expressed to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about the Midnite Mine Superfund site. This plan also outlines opportunities for the public to become involved in future investigation and cleanup activities.

EPA encourages community involvement. This plan is a flexible document and may be updated at any time. For those who would like to discuss the activities planned for this site, or have suggestions for additional activities, please call or write to:

Krista Rave	Elly Hale
Community Involvement Coordinator	Site Manager
(206) 553-6686	(206) 553-1215

or call toll-free 1-800-424-4372

Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, Washington 98101

This plan is divided into the following sections:

- A. Overview of Superfund
  - B. Site Description and Background
  - C. The Neighboring Community
  - D. Community Concerns
  - E. Objectives of the Community Involvement Program
  - F. Community Involvement Activities at this Site
- Appendix A: Contacts & Locations of Administrative Record

#### A. Overview of Superfund

In 1980, Congress passed the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), which was amended in 1986 by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA). These two laws are commonly known as Superfund.

Superfund gives the EPA authority to investigate and clean up releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances. The Superfund process is complex and can take many years to complete. On average, a site can stay on the National Priorities List (NPL) anywhere from six to ten years.

If an immediate problem threatens public health or the environment, EPA has the authority under Superfund to address the situation quickly through a removal action. Removal actions can also be conducted on sites that are not on the NPL using Superfund authority, if they pose an imminent threat to human health or the environment.

The remedial Superfund process includes a detailed investigation at the site by taking samples of soil, water, air and waste. The samples are then studied, possible risks to people and the environment are considered, and a range of possible cleanup strategies are evaluated. EPA evaluates the possible cleanup strategies using nine evaluation criteria, including public acceptance, and then chooses the best remedy.

The chosen remedy is then designed and constructed. Upon completion of the remedy, there is a requirement to operate, maintain, or monitor the site for several years.

## B. Site Description and Background

Midnite Mine is an inactive open-pit uranium mine located eight miles northwest of Wellpinit on the Spokane Tribe Reservation.

Midnite Mine was developed in 1955 by Dawn Mining Company (DMC). Between 1955 and 1981, mining of uranium ore at the mine generated three million tons of ore, 2.5 million tons of lower grade ore (protore), and 33 million tons of waste rock. Much of the ore was milled at the Dawn millsite in Ford, but the waste rock and piles of ore/protore remain on site. Four of the pits were refilled with waste rock during the mine operations. Two pits remain open and contain water.

Rocks in the Midnite Mine area contain natural radioactive minerals and metals. Sulfides in rocks exposed by mining react with oxygen and cause water, such as rain or snowmelt, to acidify when it comes in contact with the rocks. The acidic water can then pick up heavy metals from the mineralized rocks and carry them into creeks and groundwater. Uranium and other radioactive minerals can also leave the mine, carried by wind and water passing through the site.

Since 1992, DMC has been required to collect contaminated water flowing from mined areas. The water is treated on-site to remove contamination and is discharged to a surface drainage that leads to Blue Creek. Sludge resulting from the water treatment is transported by truck to DMC's mill, processed to extract uranium, and disposed of in the lined tailings disposal pond at the mill. While this effort has helped reduce the amount of contaminated water leaving the site, a more effective and permanent control is needed. People using the site and areas contaminated by the site may be exposed to radioactive minerals and heavy metals. As part of its study, EPA will conduct a risk assessment to understand human health risks posed by site contamination for current and future users of the area.

Previous samples taken by U.S. Bureau of Mines and the U.S. Geological Survey, document that seeps, groundwater, and pit water at the mine are contaminated with heavy metals and radionuclides. In April 1998, EPA conducted an Expanded Site Inspection. Elevated levels of metals and radionuclides were confirmed in numerous on-site sources. Several seeps not currently captured by DMC's collection system contain elevated levels of metals and radionuclides. These seeps enter drainages which lead to Blue Creek.

Blue Creek flows into the Spokane River arm of Lake Roosevelt. It is an important spawning and nursery area for rainbow trout and other fish, including the Paiute sculpin, a species of "special concern" in the state of Washington. EPA samples of surface water and sediment from Blue Creek contain elevated levels of metals and radionuclides.

EPA proposed Midnite Mine to the Superfund list of sites eligible for federal cleanup funds in February of 1999. Preparation for the study, which EPA anticipates will take two years, is underway. The study will conclude with a cleanup decision that reflects input from the community.

### C. The Neighboring Community

The Midnite Mine site is approximately eight miles from the town of Wellpinit, Washington. The entire site is located on the Spokane Reservation in Stevens County.

The Spokane Indians are part of the Interior Salish group which inhabited northeastern Washington, northern Idaho, and western Montana for centuries. The word "Spokane" is generally accepted as meaning "Sun People" or "Children of the Sun", although the interpretation is somewhat controversial.

In 1990, the population of the Spokane Indian Reservation was 1,502. Eighty three percent of the population on the Spokane Indian Reservation are American Indians with the median (mid-range) age of 22 years.

The majority of the houses on the reservation rely on private sources of water, sewage disposal and heat. Approximately 51% rely on water from private wells, 38% have access to a public water system or private water company, and 11% obtain their water from other sources.

Many reservation residents are employed by the logging industry with a few members in farming and livestock.

The Spokane Tribal Council serves as both the legislative and executive branch of the Tribe. The Council consists of a chairperson and three council members.

#### D. Community Concerns

Representatives from EPA met with several members of the Tribal Council on March 24, 1999. EPA representatives also participated in a meeting with the Spokane Tribe on July 22, 1999. In preparation for this Community Involvement Plan, a meeting announcement was mailed to approximately 800 members of the tribe. These meetings help EPA understand community concerns and how residents would like to be involved in the process. In addition, the meetings sometimes provide information which may help the investigation and cleanup.

EPA recognizes that there may be additional concerns and/or information we should hear. Please feel free to contact Krista Rave, Community Involvement Coordinator, at any time to share your concerns or to become involved.

During the meetings on March 24th and July 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Site Manager provided a brief overview of the past activities at the Site and the Superfund process. Meeting attendees expressed the following concerns and questions:

- It is important to include the entire drainage in the investigation. Blue Creek was identified as an important commodity to the Tribe. Camping, fishing and using the water in sweat lodges are some of the ways the Tribe uses the Creek.
- The Spokane Tribe have historically relied heavily on salmon. The Blue and Chimaken creeks begin on the reservation and are used for fishing several different types of fish. The whole

fish, including the head and bones, are typically used in stews.

- One tribal member mentioned the stress that members of the tribe feel about the mine. He feels that the mine left a terrible scar and that it needs to be taken care of.

- Some livestock graze around the mine area and there is concern about cattle grazing and taking in any contamination.

- EPA needs to be clear where the site is in the Superfund process. People are going to want to know what is happening and know the facts about what has been found at the site.

- A couple of people expressed concern about who EPA is accountable to. There have been other federal agencies in the past who have come to meetings and have told the Tribe what is going to be done and not ask for input. This has resulted in mistrust about EPA's willingness to involve the Tribe in the activities at the site.

- A couple of people are concerned that the mining company will get away with not having to pay for the cleanup.

- Others are concerned about the length of time it is taking for anything to get done at the site. They feel that there has been a lot of federal agencies involved with very little impact on the actual damage the mine has had. They are concerned that the site is being studied to death.

- One person asked if the route that the trucks have been taking when hauling waste from the mine to the mill will be studied.

- One tribal member who lives off the reservation was not able to attend the meeting and telephoned to express his concerns. The member discovered and used to work out at the mine and does not want to see the mine cleaned up. He feels that the tribe needs it for jobs. He said Blue Creek was contaminated before the mine was active and knows that because he tested the water. He also feels that EPA should not fill the pits at the mine, because the water in the pits can be used to help with forest fires.

- EPA representatives asked about the best ways to keep the community informed of activities at the site. The Tribal Council suggested using the Rawhide Press and regular public meetings.

The same question was asked at the meeting on the 22nd. Many attendees feel that regular public meetings are a good idea. Also, the Rawhide Press was suggested as a way to notify people about meetings, along with the Indian Country Today. One citizen

mentioned the internet and said that would be a good way to keep people up to date on the activities at the site.

#### E. Objectives of the Community Involvement Program

The Community Involvement Program described in this Plan provides citizens with an opportunity to be informed and involved in the Midnite Mine Superfund site. Communication and input from the affected community is crucial to the program. The objectives of the Community Involvement Program are to:

1: Give citizens the opportunity to comment on and be involved in technical decisions. Encourage and assist local citizens in providing input to agency decisions that will have long term effects on their community.

2: Inform the public of planned and ongoing activities.

3: Respond to questions, concerns and conflicts as they occur.

#### F: Community Involvement Activities:

Listed below are some of the tools that EPA uses to keep communities informed and involved in the activities at sites. The level of community interest at the Midnite Mine site will be closely monitored and activities will be conducted as appropriate. This list can be updated at any time and EPA welcomes additional suggestions from community members.

Information Repository: The purpose of an information repository is to have information available for public review. All technical documents and reports will be placed in the Information Repository at the Spokane Tribe Department of Natural Resources, located on the Ford/Wellpinit Road.

Technical Assistance Grants (TAG grant): EPA will place information on TAG grants in the Information Repository. A TAG grant provides matching funds to *citizen groups* affected by a Superfund site. The money is used by the citizens group to hire a technical advisor to help them interpret and understand technical materials produced as part of the Superfund process. Grants up to \$50,000 are available for a three year period, which can be extended and additional funds can be requested. The group is required to provide a local share contribution of 20% of the total cost and can count the value of volunteer services and contributions of supplies toward the match. Volunteer services and donated supplies used toward the match are called "in-kind

contributions". To receive more information, please call Jeanne O'Dell, EPA TAG Coordinator, at (206) 553-6919 or 1-800-424-4372.

Workshops: Informal workshops are not planned at this time. However, citizens or the Tribal Council may request a workshop on such topics as: The Superfund Process, Sampling Techniques, Potential Health and Environmental Risks Associated with the Site, and Cleanup Alternatives. If you would like to have a workshop on any subject related to the Midnite Mine Superfund site, please contact Krista Rave, at (206) 553-6686 or toll-free at 1-800-424-4372.

Public Meetings: Public Meetings will be used to provide updated information throughout the Superfund process and during public comment periods to solicit public input. At this site, public meetings will be held approximately every quarter. Public meetings will be announced in future fact sheets and notices in the Rawhide Press. Announcements for public meetings during public comment periods will be announced in the Rawhide Press and in the Tribune, in Deer Park. Meeting announcements will be posted at various locations, such as the Post Offices in Ford, Fruitland, and Wellpinit. Also, the community center at the west end of the reservation and the Tribal Office in Wellpinit will be used.

Fact Sheets: Fact sheets and other materials summarizing Site activities and technical documents will be sent to EPA's mailing list. The Tribe has a database of tribal members and will provide EPA with labels for Site related mailings.

Web Site: Fact sheets and other information about the Site will be displayed on the EPA web page. The web page is at: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>. Once in EPA's site, click on Superfund, then click on Sites, then click on NPL Sites by State, then click on Washington and go down until you see Midnite Mine.

Communication with the Spokane Nation: The following activities will allow on-going communication between the Tribe, interested citizens and EPA:

- EPA will offer Government to Government meetings at critical periods throughout the Superfund process, or as requested by the Tribal Council.
- EPA representatives will coordinate with the Spokane Tribe's Department of Natural Resources and the designated Tribal Council contact throughout the process.
- The EPA Site Manager and Community Involvement Coordinator will

work with the EPA Tribal Liaison, Doug Cole.

Community Involvement Activities to Date:

A site mailing list has been generated and will be updated on a regular basis. The Tribe will also continue to send mailing labels to EPA for tribal member mailings.

A 60-day public comment period was held following the proposal to add the Midnite Mine site to the National Priorities List.

EPA representatives met with members of the Tribal Council on March 24, 1999 to discuss the site and interview them for the Community Involvement Plan. Their comments have been included.

The Tribe hosted an informational meeting for EPA to talk with tribal members and conduct community interviews on July 22, 1999. The meeting had to be rescheduled twice due to deaths in the Tribe. Concerns expressed during the July 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting are outlined in this Community Involvement Plan.

Three fact sheets have been distributed: April 1998, July 1999 and October 1999.

Notices announcing roadside testing were posted in August 1999.

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting the Community Involvement Coordinator, Krista Rave, at (206) 553-6686.

## Appendix A: Key Contacts

### EPA Officials:

Krista Rave, Community Involvement Coordinator, (206)553-6686

Elly Hale, Site Manager, (206)553-1215

You may also call EPA toll-free at 1-800-424-4372

Doug Cole, Tribal Liaison, (208) 378-5764

### For Health Related Questions or Concerns:

Ric Robinson, Agency for Toxics Substances and Disease Registry  
at (206) 553-5114.

### Tribal Contacts:

Mary Verner, Director, Department of Natural Resources,  
(509) 258-9042

Davy Wynecoop, Tribal Council, at (509) 258-4581

Website: <http://www.spokanetribe.com/>

### Elected Federal Officials:

Senator Slade Gorton  
c/o Catherine O'Connell  
697 US Courthouse  
West 920 Riverside  
Spokane, WA 99201

Senator Patty Murray  
c/o Sue Bradford  
West 601 First Ave, Suite 506  
Spokane, WA 99204

Representative George Nethercutt  
c/o Nancy Fike  
US Courthouse  
920 West Riverside, Suite 594  
Spokane, WA 99210

Newspapers:

Rawhide Press

PO Box 100  
Wellpinit, WA 99040

High Country News

PO Box 1090  
Paonia, CO 81428

Tribune

104 N. Main  
Deer Park, WA 99006

The Administrative Record, a file containing all information used to make decisions on response actions for the site, will be available at the following locations:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Seventh Floor Records Center  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, Washington

and

The Spokane Tribe of Indian Natural Resources  
on Ford-Wellpinit Road  
PO Box 100  
Wellpinit, WA 99040