

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

TALACHE MINE TAILINGS SITE

Atlanta, Idaho



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

July 2002

Cleanup in Depositional Area Set to Begin

Beginning the week of July 22, 2002, EPA will oversee additional cleanup work in the *Depositional Area* of the Talache Mine Site near Atlanta, Idaho. The Depositional Area is where mine tailings were deposited when one of the historic tailings piles partially collapsed in May 1997. The cleanup work will include excavating tailings and contaminated soil from about 25 acres located in the Depositional Area, placing clean backfill in the area, and revegetating disturbed areas. The objective of this work is to make the entire Depositional Area safe for recreational use, and smaller portions of the area safe for future residential use. The cleanup is expected to be completed in the fall.

What is the Environmental Problem?

The Depositional Area is the 60-acre area where contaminated mine tailings were deposited after one of the tailings piles collapsed in May 1997. The tailings contain arsenic and other metals that could pose a risk to people and the environment. EPA has collected water, soil and sediment samples throughout the Depositional Area. The sampling results were used to complete a human health risk assessment, an evaluation of risks to plants and animals, and a report on cleanup alternatives. The studies found that:

- High levels of arsenic and other metals are present in some parts of the Depositional Area. Arsenic ranges from 9 to 1,780 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg, or parts per million) across the Depositional Area.
- Arsenic concentrations in areas outside of the Depositional Area average 36 parts per million.
- Arsenic in surface soil could pose a risk to people that use the area for recreation, and to people that may build homes in the Depositional Area in the future.
- Populations of fish, plants and animals are not being affected by arsenic or any other contaminants at the site.

EPA developed soil cleanup goals for arsenic that protect human health and the environment. In areas limited to recreational activities, the cleanup goal is 360 parts per million. The soil cleanup goal for areas intended for future residential use is 36 parts per million.

The soil cleanup goal for residential use is much lower than for recreational activity because the frequency and length of exposure to arsenic would be much larger for a resident. So with this potential for increased exposure, the level of remaining arsenic must be much lower to protect public health in a residential setting.

What to Expect During Construction

Tailings in the Depositional Area will be removed using heavy construction equipment such as bulldozers, back-hoes and dump trucks. Tailings removal will require clearing vegetation from the area to be cleaned up. The tailings will be transferred to dump trucks and transported to the lower tailings pile where they will be covered with a minimum of 12 inches of clean soil. After the tailings are removed from the Depositional Area, soil samples will be collected to ensure that cleanup levels are met. Some areas may require additional clean soil backfill to meet cleanup goals. Vegetation and trees removed from the site during the cleanup will be burned in the late fall when it is safe to do so. The area will be revegetated once cleanup levels have been achieved.

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The work will be performed from July through November 2002 during daylight hours (7:00am to 6:00pm). There will be increased traffic in the Atlanta area during construction, including several trucks each day moving on and off the Depositional Area and between the tailings pile and the Depositional Area. Clean fill will be transported in dump trucks from an offsite location as necessary. Workers' cars may also be parked nearby. Traffic, dust, and erosion control measures will ensure as little disruption as possible. Public access to campgrounds, hot springs, or areas outside of the Depositional Area will not be affected.

The work will be done by a private construction company according to plans and specifications approved by EPA, and with oversight from EPA. The construction work will be paid for by the parties responsible for the site.



Workers study a portion of the mine tailings *Depositional Area* to be cleaned up.

Choosing a Cleanup Option

EPA developed and evaluated a broad range of alternatives for cleaning up the Depositional Area in a document called an Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA). The following is a summary of the alternatives considered in the EE/CA:

- Alternative 1 - No Action.
- Alternative 2 - Selective Soil Covering for Recreational Use
- Alternative 3 - Selective Soil Removal and Backfilling for Recreational Use
- Alternative 4 - Selective Soil Removal and Backfilling for Residential Use
- Alternative 5 - Soil Removal and Backfilling to Background Concentrations.

Each of the cleanup alternatives were evaluated on the basis of effectiveness at protecting human health and the environment, ease of implementation, and cost.

Last year, EPA held an informational meeting and asked for comments from Atlanta residents on the cleanup alternatives. After considering public comments and evaluating the alternatives, EPA selected a cleanup plan that combines aspects of Alternatives 3 and 4.

The cleanup plan involves excavation of tailings and contaminated soil, then backfilling certain areas with clean soil so that some parts of the Depositional Area will be safe for future residential use. The rest of the Depositional Area will be safe for recreational use. This cleanup plan implements an agreement between affected landowners concerning future use of land in the Depositional Area.

Site History

The Talache Mine Tailings Site is located near Atlanta, Idaho. On May 15, 1997, one of two historic tailings piles at the site (the Upper Tailings Pile) failed, releasing 16,000 cubic yards of tailings into the valley below.

The 60-acre area where the tailings were deposited is known as the "Depositional Area" and includes both upland and wetland areas. The two tailings piles and the Depositional Area together make up the site.

The main environmental concerns at the site include the stability of the tailings piles, and the presence of arsenic and other metals in the Depositional Area.

In February 1999, EPA reached agreement with the Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) to study the site, and to develop and evaluate cleanup alternatives for the tailings piles and the Depositional Area.

In 2000 and 2001, site cleanup included stabilizing the piles by buttressing the exterior slopes of the piles, regrading the surface of each pile, placing a soil cover, revegetating, and managing water running on and off the site.

The PRPs have agreed to implement a cleanup action in the Depositional Area and to monitor the springs and seeps coming from the base of the tailings piles, and to install water treatment if necessary.

For More Information

Copies of site studies and reports on the Talache Mine Site are available at:

Atlanta Post Office
Atlanta, Idaho

EPA's Boise Office
1435 North Orchard Street
Boise, Idaho

EPA Records Center
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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- or -

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To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting EPA at one of the numbers listed above.

Check out EPA Region 10's website at:
<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>.

Click on "Index," then "T" to find the Talache Mine Site webpage.