


Southeast Idaho UPDATE

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY REGION 10

October 2001

Highlighting EPA Activities in the Greater Pocatello and Fort Hall Areas

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, and local governments all share the responsibility for protecting the quality of the soil, water, and air in southeast Idaho. EPA periodically publishes this newsletter to help keep you informed about the work it is doing in your area.

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PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD EXTENDED

The public comment period on the RCRA Closure and Post-Closure Plans for FMC/Astaris Waste Ponds 17 & 18 has been extended to November 16, 2001.
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**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101**

**Open Letter from the Environmental Protection Agency
Concerning the Closure of the Astaris Facility**

Dear Concerned Citizens of Greater Pocatello and Fort Hall:

EPA staff who have worked on the many environmental issues related to the Astaris facility over the past several years were notified on October 11th – at the same time as plant employees – of the plan to close down operations by the end of this year. We realize that the closure is having a serious effect on many lives, and our thoughts are with those families affected by the layoffs.

Many residents in your area have expressed concern about what this announcement means for the cleanup of environmental contamination at the facility. We want to reassure you that the plant closure will not reduce EPA's commitment, or company obligations, to making this site permanently safe for the public and the environment.

Astaris and the prior owner, FMC, still remain legally responsible for ongoing environmental cleanup work, and have been cooperative in working with EPA to meet cleanup requirements. In addition to previously initiated cleanup work, the companies are obligated to complete closure of hazardous waste ponds, to install and maintain protective caps on these ponds, and to monitor the groundwater near those ponds. In addition, the companies have been required to establish letters of credit, ensuring that funds are available to EPA to get that work done if the companies do not follow through on their obligations.

EPA will retain a strong role for as long as the cleanup process takes, and we will use our authorities under our two major hazardous waste laws – Superfund, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) – to ensure a result that protects human health and the environment. Following is a summary of a few recent activities and developments at the site.

- Work on the Superfund cleanup process for the site will not be significantly affected by the decision to close the facility, and the RCRA process will now shift its focus from issuing a permit for an operating waste treatment facility to developing what is referred to as a Post-closure Permit, which includes provisions for long term monitoring of the capped wastes. Both the Superfund and RCRA processes will focus on cleaning up contamination and protecting groundwater.
- Because the phosphorus production plant will no longer be operating and producing waste, further construction of the LDR waste treatment system has been halted by the company. This system was being built on site to treat hazardous production wastes at the plant. As a result of the announced closure of the production plant, EPA cancelled a public meeting which had been scheduled for October 23 to discuss the LDR waste treatment facility.
- The 30-day public comment period on the RCRA Closure and Post-closure Plans for Ponds 17 & 18 which began on October 4th has been extended for two weeks to November 16, 2001. These plans provide detailed technical information about how the waste contained in the ponds will be capped safely and how monitoring will be done to protect groundwater in the area from contamination. Many other ponds at the facility have already been capped in this manner, which EPA considers to be a safe and effective solution for managing these wastes. This comment period follows a decision by EPA on a proposal announced for public comment in August 2001 to allow the companies to cap Pond 18 instead of removing the waste and treating it in the LDR Treatment System.

EPA will continue to work with FMC and Astaris, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, state and local agencies, and the public to ensure that this site is closed in an environmentally responsible way. Over the coming months, we will continue to provide updates and information, and there will be many opportunities for the public to provide input to EPA about its work at the facility. We truly welcome and appreciate your participation.

Sincerely,
L. John Iani
Regional Administrator

Closure of FMC/Astaris Waste Ponds 17 and 18

Following a 30-day public comment period that ended September 21, 2001, EPA decided to approve a proposal by FMC/Astaris to place a protective cap over Pond 18 instead of removing and treating the waste in the LDR Treatment System. This decision means that Pond 18 will now be capped in a manner similar to other waste ponds that have already been closed and capped at the facility.

Specific requirements regarding cap construction and groundwater monitoring activities are contained in detailed documents called **Closure and Post-closure Plans**. Draft copies of these plans for Pond 18, along with draft Closure and Post-closure Plans for Pond 17 which will also be capped, are currently available for your review and comment.

How does a cap prevent groundwater contamination?

The surface of a cap consists of a layer of topsoil and vegetation. Underneath the surface, many layers of natural and synthetic materials are installed to prevent gas emissions and to keep rainwater from passing through the buried waste and potentially carrying hazardous chemicals into surrounding soil or water (also called "leaching"). The caps for Ponds 17 and 18 will be similar in construction to the cap that has already been installed on former waste storage "Pond 8S" at the facility. The caps also include monitoring for gases, and temperature and pressure increases, which are indicators of potential problems under the

Public Comment Period Extended through November 16, 2001

Due to requests from the community following the announcement that Astaris will be closing its facility, EPA has decided to extend the comment period on the RCRA Closure and Post-Closure Plans for Ponds 17 and 18 for two weeks. The comment period began October 4th. All written (or e-mail) comments must be sent no later than Friday, November 16, 2001, to:

Linda Meyer
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Sixth Avenue (WCM-121)
Seattle, WA 98101
e-mail: meyer.linda@epa.gov

Tips for providing effective comments...

Closure plans are technical documents that often contain several volumes of detailed material. Your comments will be most valuable to us if you consider the following suggestions:

- Explain your views and tell us why you feel that way.
- Do you support or disagree with the proposed actions? Be specific about which parts if you can.
- Can you provide examples or offer alternatives?
- Be sure to include your name and mailing address with your comments.

Closure of FMC/Astaris Waste Ponds 17 & 18 (Continued)

cap.

What happens in 20 years? 50 years?

100 years or longer?

FMC is responsible and liable for all capped ponds indefinitely, regardless of the company's operating status. FMC has been required to establish letters of credit that guarantee funds are available to EPA to complete any work that might be necessary in the event that the company did not follow through on its obligations for cap maintenance and groundwater monitoring. Groundwater wells have been installed around all ponds to regularly monitor groundwater in the area to make sure the pond caps are working effectively.

Where can I find copies of the Closure Plans?

Copies of the Closure and Post-Closure Plans for Ponds 17 and 18 are available for review at the following libraries (call for hours):

Idaho State University Library

Government Documents Department
850 South 9th Avenue
Pocatello, Idaho 83209
(208) 236-2940

Shoshone-Bannock Library

Tribal Business Center
Pima Drive and Bannock Avenue
Fort Hall, Idaho 83203
(208) 238-3700

Interviews Completed for EPA Position in Pocatello

Several EPA managers traveled to Pocatello recently to interview nine candidates from a strong pool of applicants for a senior level EPA position to be based in Pocatello. Representatives from the local Idaho Department of Environmental Quality office and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes participated in the interview process. Three top candidates were selected for a second round of interviews in Seattle. EPA managers expect to make a final selection by the first week of November, and hope to have that person working in Pocatello by early January 2002.

VISIT US ON THE WEB!

Visit EPA's Region 10 website for more information about EPA activities in your community, and elsewhere in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington!

www.epa.gov/r10earth

Glossary

Consent Decree: A legally enforceable court order. The RCRA Consent Decree between FMC, EPA, and the U.S. Department of Justice was officially entered by the U.S. District Court of Idaho in July 1999. It describes actions the company must take to address violations of federal hazardous waste management laws.

LDR (Land Disposal Restrictions): RCRA regulations that establish treatment requirements to protect human health and the environment when hazardous wastes are placed in a landfill, pond, or surface impoundment.

LDR Treatment System: A waste treatment facility that FMC was required to design and build to treat hazardous wastes produced at its phosphorus plant in Pocatello, Idaho, to comply with LDR. Because the plant will no longer be operating and producing waste, further construction of the LDR Treatment System has been halted by the company.

RCRA (Resource Conservation and Recovery Act): A federal law established in 1976 that governs management and disposal of hazardous wastes.

To learn more about the information in this newsletter, or to be added to or removed from the mailing list, please contact:

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Other Environmental Agency Contacts:

Idaho Dept. of Environmental Quality
Pocatello Regional Office
224 South Arthur
Pocatello, Idaho 83204
(208) 236-6160

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
Land Use Commission
P.O. Box 306
Fort Hall, Idaho 83203
(208) 478-3823

Or call EPA toll-free at 1-800-424-4372.

We want to provide you with useful environmental information about the work we are doing. Feel free to call, write, or e-mail to let us know how we can improve this newsletter to meet your needs.