

EPA Finalizes Site on the NPL Begins Interim Cleanup Actions

On September 16, 2011, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed the New Idria Mercury Mine (NIMM) on the federal National Priorities List, commonly called the Superfund List.

EPA has begun the process of taking interim steps to address contamination from the mine workings. The former mine is located approximately 64 miles southeast of Hollister, in San Benito County, California (see map below).

Historical mercury mining operations at the mine have resulted in mercury contamination and acid mine drainage into San Carlos Creek, Silver Creek and a portion of Panoche Creek, at levels that are toxic to aquatic organisms. Environmental impacts extend more than fifteen miles to creeks and wetland areas, and endangered species habitat, ultimately perhaps the San Joaquin River and the San Francisco Bay.

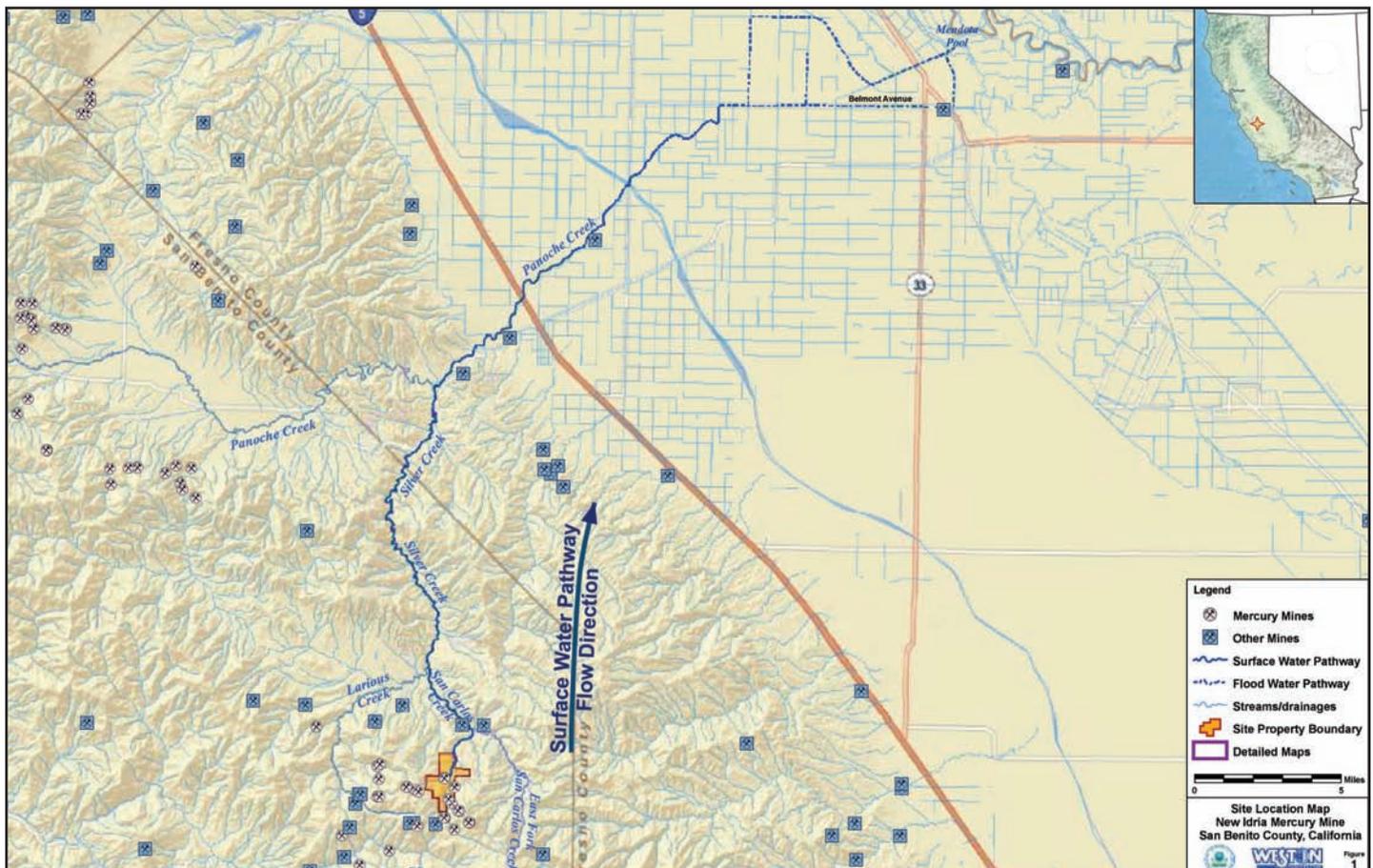


Figure 1: New Idria Mercury Mine site location

Interim Cleanup Actions

EPA's planned interim cleanup action this fall (see Figure 2) will address the following concerns:

- Water, in the form of acid mine drainage, is coming from the mine and impacts San Carlos Creek. The action will route the drainage through a conveyance to a settling pond, which will minimize the mercury picked up by the water.
- Stormwater, from rain events, flows over the tailings piles and picks up additional mercury, which is then transported to San Carlos Creek. The action will re-route the stormwater away from the tailings piles.
- Site Security: currently, there are few signs and insufficient fencing around the contaminated areas. The action will post more signs, and add fencing around the furnace area.

New Idria Mercury Mine added to NPL List

On September 16 2011, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) added the New Idria Mercury Mine site to EPA's National Priorities List (NPL), commonly called the Superfund List. Documents related to the listing are located at the San Benito County Free Library, 470 5th Street, Hollister, CA.

EPA identifies sites that may pose threats to nearby populations through actual or potential contamination of soils, groundwater, surface water, or air. Placing the site on the NPL allows EPA to use federal resources to conduct cleanup activities at the site, including investigating the sources of contamination and determining what measures may be necessary to protect human health and the environment.



Figure 2: New Idria Mine Map with planned interim actions

Now that NIMM is finalized on the Superfund List, an in-depth investigation of the location and concentration of site contaminants will be performed, followed by an analysis of ways to address the contamination. EPA will then identify the preferred cleanup remedy and share this in a public meeting, which will be accompanied by a formal public comment period. After all public comments are considered, EPA will document the selected remedy in a legal document called a Record of Decision (ROD).

Following the ROD, EPA designs, constructs, tests, operates and/or performs the necessary cleanup activities, or requires one or more legally responsible parties to do so. The public is encouraged to share its issues and concerns throughout the Superfund process.

What is Superfund?

Superfund is the commonly-used name for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), a federal law that enables EPA to respond to sites with hazardous substances that threaten public health and the environment.

EPA responds to a site by identifying those that are responsible for contaminating it, then requiring them to perform cleanup activities under EPA oversight. If EPA is unsuccessful in identifying responsible parties to perform cleanup activities, EPA may use Superfund monies to perform the cleanup itself.

If a responsible party is not identified, a site cannot undergo a federal cleanup unless it is listed on the NPL.

Community Involvement

EPA is committed to involving the public in the cleanup process at the New Idria Mercury Mine site. Its Community Involvement Program focuses on answering the community's questions about the cleanup effort, providing information to the community about site activities, and incorporating community issues and concerns into Agency decisions.

EPA organizes its public participation effort through the development of a Community Involvement Plan (CIP). This document identifies issues and concerns, methods of involving the public in the cleanup decision-making process, and other site-related information.

To start the CIP development process, EPA interviews various stakeholders (residents, activists, public officials, etc.). *If you would be willing to be interviewed by EPA to help in the production of the CIP, please contact David Cooper (see contact info at right).*

One convenient place to find major site documents is to go to EPA's web site: www.epa.gov/region09/newidria.

To learn more about the site, you will find hard copy documents at EPA's Information Repository (see right).

Information Repository

San Benito County Free Library
 470 5th Street
 Hollister, CA 95023-3885

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Mailing List Coupon

If you are not already on EPA's mailing list for the New Idria Mercury Mine Site, please send an e-mail or return the coupon below to David Cooper, Community Involvement Coordinator, U.S. EPA, Region 9, 75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-6-3), San Francisco, CA 94105, (415) 972-3245, *cooper.david@epa.gov*

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New Idria Mercury Mine

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