



EPA

Sulphur Bank Mercury Mine

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION IX • OCTOBER - NOVEMBER 2000

EPA IS CLOSING GEOTHERMAL WELLS NEAR THE HERMAN PIT

What have we done so far?

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is working at the Sulphur Bank Mercury Mine site to permanently close two old geothermal test wells and a shallow observation well. These wells are on the northeast side of the Herman Pit (see Figure 1). Three years ago, the EPA successfully completed a larger and more complicated closure of several highly pressurized wells in The Geysers Geothermal Well Field. The same EPA On-Scene-Coordinator is managing this effort. Over the last few weeks, we have built a road to the wells and excavated next to them to evaluate their condition. We also have done some work on the wellheads to prepare them for closing. This well closure work is one more step towards the final cleanup of the mine site. The long-term cleanup plan for the Superfund site should be finished and available for public comment later next year.

What are we planning to do now?

The wells will be properly closed in accordance with California Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources standards. We will use a large, specialized well-drilling rig to drill out the old, leaking plugs. We will then pump new concrete into the well bores and bury the wellheads. The EPA may start the work by December 8th, 2000. However, the exact start date depends on when the specialized drilling equipment will be available. We expect the work to be completed within two weeks of the start date.

Will this project be dangerous?

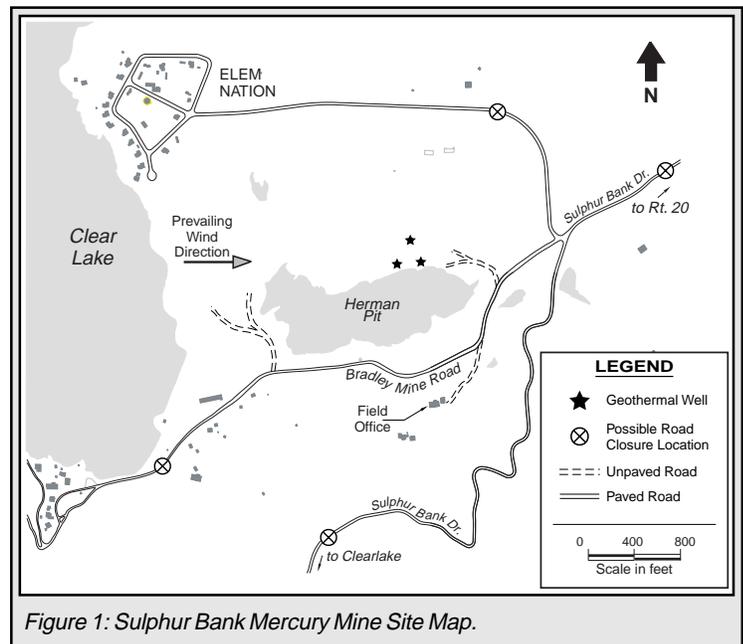
The EPA is confident that the geothermal well closure will be completed safely so that no exposure or injury occurs to local residents or on-site workers. The EPA's Office of Emergency Response believes that the wells were not properly plugged when they were originally closed in the 1960's. If the old well plugs fail unexpectedly in an uncontrolled manner, concentrated hydrogen sulfide gas trapped in the wells could escape into the atmosphere, causing potentially high exposures to local residents. Hydrogen sulfide gas is toxic if breathed in heavy concentrations. The EPA intends to close the wells in a manner that forces the gas back into the geothermal system. However there is a small chance that the old well casings could fail during the closure process. In

the unlikely event that this occurs, a cloud of the hydrogen sulfide gas could drift downwind for a short distance (less than 1/2 mile) before dissipating to very low, non-toxic levels.

What precautions are we taking?

We have met with local emergency responders and the fire department to brief them on this project and on our plans in the event of a problem. Should a release occur, these agencies will close off roads approaching the site (see Figure 1), to keep people out of the gas until it dissipates.

We are hiring drilling contractors experienced in geothermal well work and we will be continuously monitoring for hydrogen sulfide gas and other geothermal gasses. We will drill only when the wind is blowing from the west across the site away from area residences.



OPEN HOUSE

THURSDAY
DECEMBER 7TH, 2000
3:00 - 6:00 PM

AT THE
S.B.M.M. SITE
FIELD OFFICE

DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Well closure project at the mine
 - Project safety plan
- Questions/concerns from residents

Communication with local residents will receive top priority during the well closure activity. EPA representatives will be in the neighborhoods during critical phases of the well closure. Flag signals will be used to notify and warn visitors and passers-by of the hazards of the work being conducted. The flags and explanations will be posted on a board at the entrance to the site on Bradley Mine Road.

Finally, we will go door-to-door in the neighborhoods near the site to discuss this work with as many residents as possible.

What can you do?

Please call the EPA contacts listed in the box below if you have any concerns. We will hold an open house at the site Field Office (see Figure 1) from 3:00 to 6:00 PM on December 7th, 2000 to describe this project and answer your questions. Details are in the box on page 1. Please come to this open house if you have questions or concerns.



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For additional copies of this fact sheet or for other information on the Sulphur Bank Mine Superfund site, please contact:

Don Hodge
Community Involvement Coordinator
Telephone: 415-744-2427
Email: hodge.don@epa.gov

Ellen Manges
Remedial Project Manager
Telephone: 415-744-2228
Email: manges.ellen@epa.gov

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-3), San Francisco, CA 94105-1309
Fax: 415-744-1796.

Or you may leave a message on the EPA's Office of Community Involvement toll-free line at (800) 231-3075 and your call will be returned.

United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-3)
San Francisco, CA 94105
Attn: Don Hodge

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