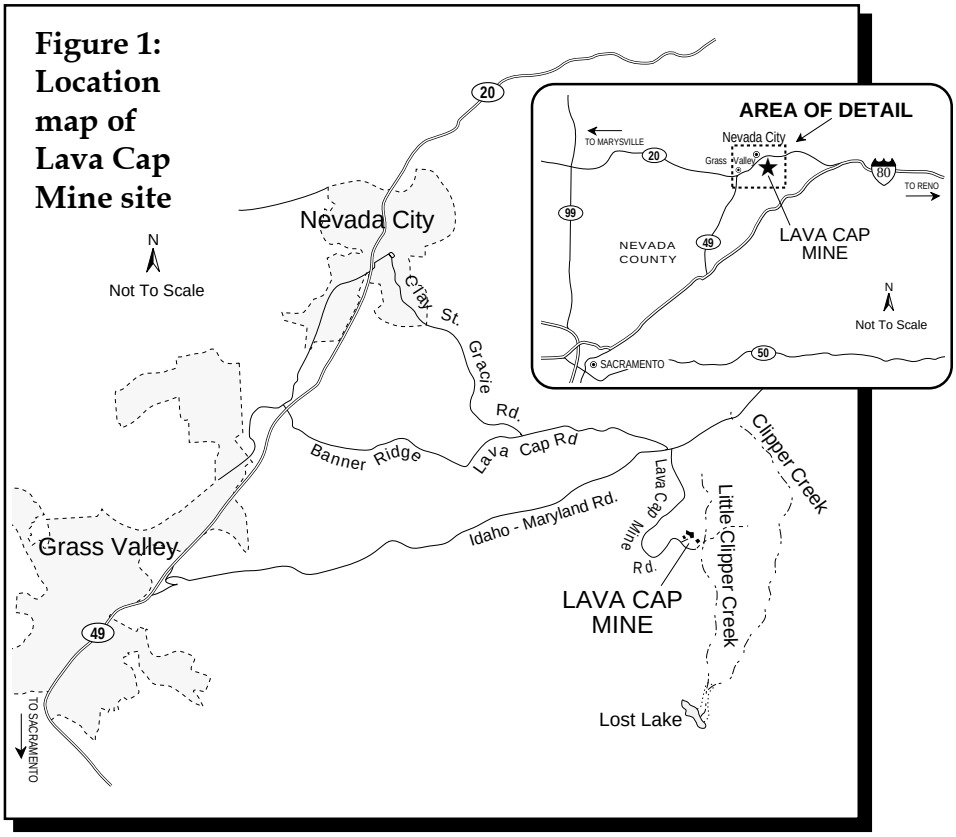
EPA LAVA CAP MINE

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION 9 • SAN FRANCISCO, CA • OCTOBER 1997

U.S. EPA To Conduct Removal Action

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Emergency Response will conduct a removal action to prevent the continued off-site migration of arsenic-contaminated mine tailings from the Lava Cap Mine into Little Clipper Creek and Lost Lake. This response is limited to addressing short-term immediate threats at the Lava Cap site. A log dam used to contain the tailings at the site was washed out after heavy rain storms in late December 1996 and early January 1997. The failure of the dam resulted in over 20,000 cubic yards of tailings being spilled into Little Clipper Creek. The tailings, which have the consistency of flour or sand, were carried downstream and deposited in Lost Lake. There are still approximately 100,000 cubic yards of contaminated mine waste near the failed dam. The 33-acre Lava Cap Mine site is located off of Lava Cap Mine Road, east of Nevada City, California.

Figure 1: Location map of Lava Cap Mine site



Site Background

Mining for gold-silver ore took place at the site beginning in 1860, and companies operated intermittently at the site until 1943. The ore was taken from underground shafts (the Banner, Central, and Belshaw shafts) and crushed into a flour-like material for processing to remove the desired metals. Methods used in processing included flotation, cyanide vat leaching, and chlorination. The material left over after processing, the mill or mine tailings, as well as mine wastes, were dumped at the site and directly into Little Clipper Creek. Some tailings eventually ended up in Lost Lake, which was constructed as an impoundment for mine tailings in the late 1930s. Other releases of mine tailings into Little Clipper Creek have occurred over the past few decades, although a significant amount of tailings and mine waste remain at the Lava Cap Mine site.

Contractors under the supervision of EPA will complete the following tasks:

• Construct diversions to reduce the flow of surface water through contaminated areas at the site. The diversions will be designed to handle amounts of water comparable to those occurring during the 1996-1997 rainy season when the dam failed.

• Move and stabilize the remaining contaminated mine tailings into an engineered surface pile to prevent further spills into Little Clipper Creek. The pile will also be covered to minimize the amount of surface water leaching through the tailings and transporting arsenic to Little Clipper Creek.

All work related to this removal action will take place at the site. The work is scheduled to begin October 29 and will take 40-45 days to complete. Crews will usually work all daylight hours, including weekends. Workers will wear protective clothing to prevent contact with the arsenic-contaminated mine tailings.

Future Activities

EPA is working to identify previous owners and operators of the Lava Cap Mine site to determine if they may have any responsibility with respect to the recent mine tailings spill and the removal action.

Although EPA is now the lead agency at the Lava Cap Mine site, other agencies at the state and local levels are working with EPA to assess impacts from the tailings spill and plan for the removal action. These agencies include the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Valley Region), and the Nevada County Department of Environmental Health.

Health and Safety Precautions

The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) has recommended that residents, particularly children, avoid coming in contact with soils along Little Clipper Creek and Lost Lake. DTSC also recommends that nearby residents do not swim in or boat on Lost Lake, because it is difficult to avoid contact with the contaminated shoreline and sediments. Typically, the mine tailings appear grey in color and have the consistency of fine sand or flour. DTSC has also recommended that residents not *"clean up"* their property at this time. For additional information on health and safety precautions, please contact Dan Ziarkowski, Project Manager, DTSC, at 916-255-3689. ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT EPA'S WORK AT THE LAVA CAP MINE SITE, PLEASE CONTACT:

Bob Mandel
On-Scene Coordinator
U.S. EPA, Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-6)
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone: 415-744-2290

John Jaros
Investigator
U.S. EPA, Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-6)
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone: 415-744-2316

Catherine McCracken
Community Involvement Specialist
U.S. EPA, Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-3)
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone: 415-744-2182
Fax: 415-744-1796

Lois Grunwald
Media Contact
Office of Communication & Government Relations
U.S. EPA, Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (CGR-2)
San Francisco, CA 94105
Telephone: 415-744-1588

MAILING LIST COUPON

If you did not receive this notice in the mail and wish to be added to EPA's mailing list to receive future mailings about the Lava Cap Mine site, please complete the coupon below and return to:

Catherine McCracken, Community Involvement Specialist, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9, 75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-3), San Francisco, CA 94105

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

*PHONE: _____ *FAX: _____ *E-MAIL: _____

*ORGANIZATIONAL AFFILIATION: _____

*(*Optional items)*

You may also provide the above information via e-mail to: McCracken.Catherine@epamail.epa.gov