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EPA: Libby cleanup on schedule

Special to the Inter Lake

LIBBY — Despite problems finding a prime contractor for the cleanup, efforts are on schedule, said Paul Peronard, on-site coordinator for the Environmental Protection Association in Libby.

Peronard was responding to concerns expressed by Libby residents during a tour of cleanup sites with Marianne Horinko, deputy administrator for the EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response — the Superfund program.

"I don't blame people for being concerned," Peronard said. "Last year we had 140 people working and things moving around everywhere. This year it appears we're milling around. It makes me nervous."

Kuo Environmental Services has been retained as the primary contractor, Peronard said. The company is moving in equipment, and cleanup of asbestos-tainted vermiculite insulation from homes should begin in the next two weeks.

Work at the former separation plant is continuing under Marcor, while track cleanup at Libby Middle School and Libby High School is moving forward and on schedule, Peronard said. The rubberized surface on the high school track will be applied in September and can't be walked on for 28 days, Peronard said.

The track will include more lanes than the original track, and will have a red surface.

Cleanup coordinator Jim Christiansen said the delays in moving the planet from the former export plant to a new site is because of Grace and the bankruptcy court's control over expenditures. Grace is waiting on approval of a $34,000 reimbursement to Mel and Judy Burnett, owners of Millwork West.

"There shouldn't be any cost to the mill [illegible] Christiansen said of [illegible]. It will be an EPA-funded cleanup."

Christiansen reminded everyone that the EPA has not removed home insulation before.

"We will work as hard as we can, as fast as we can," he said.