To: Smidinger, Betsy[Smidinger.Betsy@epa.gov]; Vranka, Joe[vranka.joe@epa.gov]
From: Kelly, Albert
Sent: Wed 9/27/2017 6:41:07 PM
Subject: Fwd: Significant News Article - "After 34 years, EPA not sure whether Butte residents are exposed to heavy metal contamination: - Montana Standard

Still need confirmation that all residential areas in OU 13 have been remediated.

Sent from my iPad

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Mutter, Andrew" <mutter.andrew@epa.gov>
Date: September 27, 2017 at 10:09:42 AM CDT
To: R8 SLT <R8_SLT@epa.gov>
Cc: "Moler, Robert" <Moler.Robert@epa.gov>, "Grantham, Nancy" <Grantham.Nancy@epa.gov>, "Kelly, Albert" <kelly.albert@epa.gov>, "Ostendorf, Jody" <ostendorf.jody@epa.gov>, "Faulk, Libby" <Faulk.Libby@epa.gov>, "Guerra, Valeria" <Guerra.Valeria@epa.gov>, "Bowman, Liz" <Bowman.Liz@epa.gov>
Subject: Significant News Article - "After 34 years, EPA not sure whether Butte residents are exposed to heavy metal contamination: - Montana Standard

After 34 years, EPA not sure whether Butte residents are exposed to heavy metal contamination

After 34 years of Superfund, the Environmental Protection Agency still does not know if residents who live on the Flat and west of Uptown are being exposed to heavy metal contamination.

That news appeared in an internal EPA report last week that looked at problems caused by understaffing across all of EPA's regions.

The report, produced internally by EPA's Office of the Inspector General, says that both the Inspector General as well as the U.S. Government Accountability Office have issued over 10 reports in 21 years citing the need for EPA to analyze work load and staff.

That lack of staffing to handle the workload in Butte has led to an entire area where residents live potentially at risk for human health.

The report says EPA has "insufficient data to determine whether human exposure is under control," in the area known as West Side Soils, which includes both the Flat and an undefined area west of Uptown.

"Potential health threats include direct contact with and ingestion of contaminated soil, surface water and groundwater and inhaling contaminated soil," the report states.

Even the boundary of West Side Soils is unknown, says retired state project manager for Butte Superfund Joe Griffin.

"It's everything. It's undefined. It's never had a defined boundary. It's a real junk basket, to tell you the truth. A junk basket of everything else we didn't think of yet," Griffin said.

The Montana Standard requested a map of West Side Soils to EPA. EPA did not respond to that specific request.

Griffin said there is no map.

The county's Superfund coordinator Jon Sesso said he agrees with the Inspector General's report and he's "glad somebody noticed."

"If this is more of an audit report on how EPA hasn't had sufficient resources to address the concerns of the communities, they don't. They don't have the resources, so few resources, in fact, they haven't even started this one (section of the larger Superfund site)."

Sesso pointed out that the work necessary to begin understanding a site — which includes how bad the damage is, where it extends to and who is responsible for it — was done on the Butte Hill in the early 1990s.

But none of that work was ever done on the Flat or west of Uptown, which contains hundreds of abandoned mines. The EPA declared Silver Bow Creek a Superfund site in 1983.

The report says Denver-based Region 8 responded to the Inspector General's survey by saying that the site work on the Flat and West of Uptown "could not start due to lack of full-time employees at the Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area NPL site in Butte, Montana."

EPA Project Manager Nikia Greene is in charge of most of the sections of the Silver Bow Creek/Butte Area Superfund site. That includes the Berkeley Pit, the Butte Hill and Rocker. Greene provides support as well on the 26 miles of lower Silver Bow Creek cleanup, which the state oversees.

Greene also used to be the project manager for Warm Springs Ponds, east of Anaconda, and support for a completely separate Superfund site in Butte known as Montana Pole Plant. But this past summer EPA brought in a new project manager, Allie Archer, for those sites.

EPA's Montana-based Community Involvement Coordinator Robert Moler responded to The Standard's request for comment by saying that the studies and investigations which comprise EPA's initial steps to get a clear picture of the environmental degradation and how it might or might not affect the community will take place.

Moler could not say when that would happen.

Moler confirmed that EPA has yet to determine who the responsible party is for the Flat and the area west of Uptown.

Currently there is no project manager for West Side Soils. Moler said via email that a project manager will be assigned before the investigation and studies begin. When that will happen is also unknown.

President Donald Trump's budget recommendation slashes the EPA's Superfund budget by $326 million.

Butte-Silver Bow Superfund Operations Manager Eric Hassler said the county's Residential Metals Abatement Program — most often referred to by its acronym RMAP — does sample attics in what could be vaguely defined as West Side Soils. Hassler said the county samples attics as far east as the East Ridge and as far west as Rocker; as far south as Basin Creek area and as far north as Moulton Road area north of Yankee Doodle Tailings Pond. All of those areas fall outside the Butte Hill.

Hassler said that the county does investigate soil outside of the Butte Hill if the public health department finds elevated blood lead levels in children.

"It's very public health driven," Hassler said.

Department of Environmental Quality Director Tom Livers said DEQ has "urged EPA, on several occasions, to begin the formal Superfund process on West Side Soils."

"This stems in part from human health risks having not yet been fully evaluated," Livers said via email. "We understand the resource limitations of EPA Region 8, including the Montana office. If EPA were to suddenly pursue this site more aggressively, we also would struggle to find the resources to adequately fulfill our state consultative role."

Gov. Steve Bullock said, via email, "Butte has been waiting long enough."

"It should be an EPA priority," he added. "The state has made it very clear where we stand and we will be working with the EPA to get them to commit more resources to Montana."

Both of Montana's senators, Democrat Jon Tester and Republican Steve Daines responded via email to the report.

"The federal government must do better at cleaning up Superfund sites. It is common sense to develop priorities and distribute resources around your priorities. For years the EPA has failed to identify and dedicate resources strategically putting Montanans' health at risk. We need to prioritize and distribute manpower accordingly," Daines said.

Tester said the fact that Butte is still waiting for cleanup after three decades is "totally unacceptable."

"Butte must get cleaned up, and that means having appropriate workers and resources to get the job done. I will be working with folks on the ground to hold the EPA accountable and ensure they are putting their staff where they are most needed, like the Butte community," Tester said.

Citizens Technical Environmental Committee President Dave Williams called the issue a symptom of a wider problem.

"There's not enough people in government to do, in theory, what government's supposed to do. They don't change the laws then they expect you can do more with less," Williams said. "You reach a point where you can't do more with less. You can only do more with less for a certain period of time and then can't get anything done."

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http://mtstandard.com/news/local/after-years-epa-not-sure-whether-butte-residents-are-exposed/article_dbeea137-db42-5c8b-aede-30e3ccc297fa.html

Best regards,

Andrew

Andrew Mutter

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