Joint EPA NDEP Messages

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) are continuing to explore all options for funding long term solutions to address the Arimetco portion of the Yerington/Anaconda Mine Site (Site).

These options include:

a. continued operation of the current Arimetco fluid management system with enhanced fluid evaporation until a prospective new mine operator commits resources to address the entire Arimetco portion of the Site;
b. a legally binding settlement between NDEP and interested private parties that provides the necessary resources to address the Site; and
c. seeking federal funding.

To date, neither of the first two options has developed into a reliable long term solution for the Arimetco portion of the Site. While it is estimated that the fluid capacity of the existing containment systems on the Arimetco portion of the Site will not be exceeded until mid-2019, due to the length of time it takes to get federal funding in place, EPA is proposing to take steps now to make the site eligible for federal funding. On December 22, EPA Region 9 sent a request to Governor Sandoval seeking the State's position on listing the Anaconda/Yerington Mine Site on the EPA National Priorities List or "NPL". EPA has requested a response from the State by January 29, 2016.

Proposing to list the Site on the NPL does not mean conditions have changed at the Site, it merely makes the Site eligible for federal funding. Listing a site on the NPL makes the site eligible for federal funding, but it does not guarantee federal funding. Budgeting decisions for NPL sites are made during the annual federal budget process. Use of federal funds requires state contributions of 10% of capital costs and 100% of operation and maintenance costs.

EPA and NDEP will continue to work simultaneously on the other two funding options. EPA and NDEP view the NPL listing process and federal funding as a potential "backstop" to address the Arimetco portion of the Site by 2019 if the other options are unsuccessful.

As stated in previous EPA outreach materials, there is no evidence contamination from the Site has affected any agricultural products in the Yerington Area. Mason and Smith Valleys account for a vast majority of the agricultural product sales in the State of Nevada, registering over $100-million in state reports, as it consistently ranks No. 1 or No. 2 in that category statewide.

Additionally, the City of Yerington water supply is not impacted by the Site and complies with federal drinking water requirements. Steps have been taken to address exposure to contaminants from the Site via drinking water wells through a bottled water program that was initiated in 2003 and recent efforts to extend the City of Yerington supply into the Mason Valley. Work on the remainder of the Site will continue under EPA oversight of Atlantic Richfield.

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BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Arimetco Inc. operated a copper mine at the Site from the late 1980s until it declared bankruptcy and then abandoned the site in 2000, leaving behind 250 acres of un-reclaimed heap leach pads and 12 acres of mine fluid containment systems.

Since 2000, EPA and the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection (NDEP) have stabilized the Arimetco portion of the Site. Over $15 million has been spent on:

- investigations and engineering studies;
- removal and disposal of waste materials;
- operation, repair and maintenance of the fluid management system; and
- addition of 14.6 million gallons of fluid containment capacity.

Atlantic Richfield Company (ARC) and current land owner Singatse Peak Services (SPS) have also contributed to these stabilization measures.

Despite these actions, fluid containment capacity is not keeping pace with fluid generation caused by rainfall on the heaps and accumulation of evaporative salts. It is estimated that construction of a more permanent remedy would need to begin in mid-2019 to avoid exceeding the capacity of the existing system and risking release of fluids to on-site soils and groundwater.

Independent preliminary estimates conducted by engineering firms contracted separately by NDEP and EPA indicate the overall capital construction costs for closure of the Arimetco portion of the Site is in the range of $30 to 40 million. Most of the cost is for moving large amounts of material to cover the Arimetco heap leach pads and prevent precipitation from creating additional draindown fluids.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT

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