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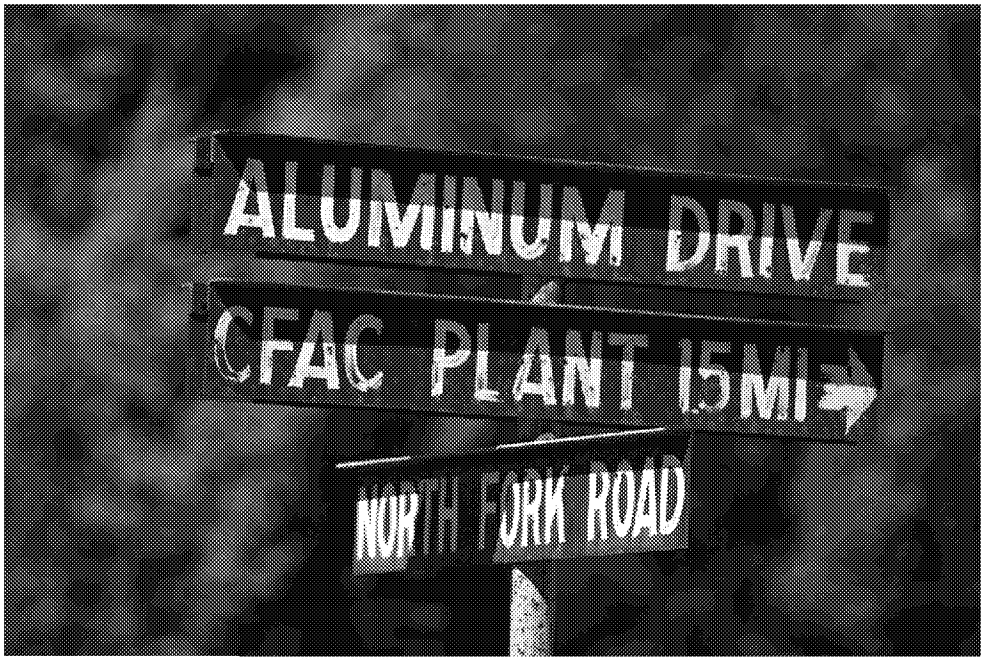
Bullock Pushes for Superfund Listing at CFAC

Montana governor joins Sen. Tester in urging EPA to move forward with Superfund listing of former aluminum plant

BY BEACON STAFF // FEB 18, 2015 // LATEST HEADLINES, NEWS & FEATURES



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Echoing concerns of local residents and lawmakers, Gov. Steve Bullock is urging the Environmental Protection Agency to list the shuttered Columbia Falls Aluminum Company plant site on the Superfund National Priority List.

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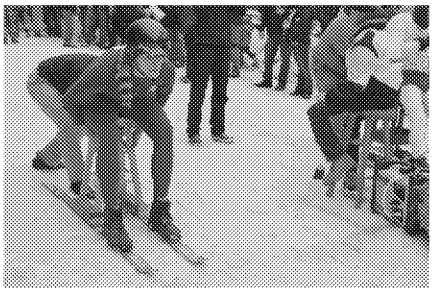
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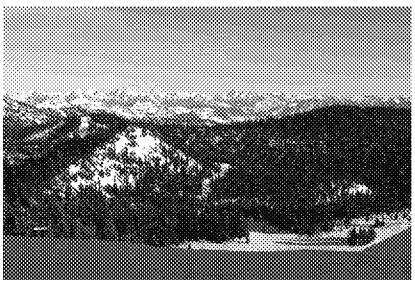
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Bullock sent a letter to EPA Regional Administrator Shaun McGrath encouraging the agency to proceed with listing the site on the priority list and moving forward with cleanup.

"I'm concerned that if this issue remains unaddressed, the contamination from the site is serious enough to pose long-term risks to the community and to Montana's environment, including the Flathead River," Bullock said in his letter.

In his letter, Bullock urged the EPA to work with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to move forward with cleanup.

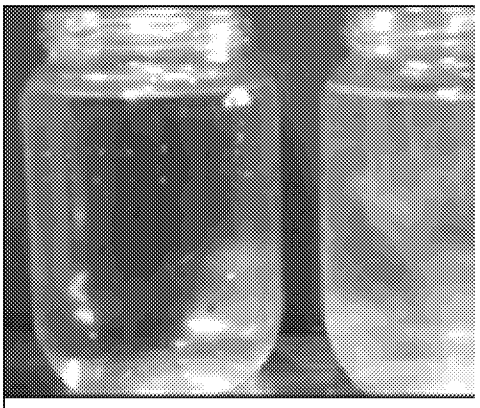
"It is my understanding that there is sufficient data to justify an NPL listing," he wrote. "Most importantly, there is widespread local support for NPL listing of the site to ensure appropriate cleanup that will ultimately allow for redevelopment of the site."

He asked for the agency to conduct periodic residential well sampling until there is sufficient data or cleanup to indicate that contamination of residential wells is not a potential risk.

"The plant was a critical part of the economy of Columbia Falls and the site has been idle for too long," Bullock stated. "It has tremendous potential for redevelopment and will be an important anchor in the future of the region."

Bullock's letter comes over a month after Montana Sen. Jon Tester penned a letter to EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy similarly pushing for a Superfund listing for CFAC.

Negotiations broke down in recent months between CFAC, its parent company Glencore and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality over how to proceed with remediation and assessment of the site.



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Recent reports from the state DEQ and the EPA have shown the site is eligible for Superfund status, but the site's owner, Glencore, a Swiss commodities firm, has never explained what it intends to do with the property.

Both Glencore and CFAC have stated publicly that they oppose Superfund listing and recently hired their own environmental consulting firm to develop an independent remedial investigation work plan.

Potentially hazardous materials were discovered in soil, groundwater and surface water at the plant site, and cyanide contamination was found in sediment in the Flathead River.

The NPL is the list of national priorities among the known releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants throughout the United States. It is used to guide the EPA in determining which sites warrant further investigation.

The CFAC plant began producing aluminum in 1955, with production reaching 180,000 tons of aluminum by 1968. At its height, the plant employed 1,500 people and was central to the area's economy.

When it shut down at the end of October 2009, the closure forced the layoff of nearly 90 workers as high-energy prices and poor market conditions made operations unprofitable.

If listed, past and present owners would be assigned cleanup costs; if they are unwilling to pay, the cleanup can move forward with money from the Superfund program.

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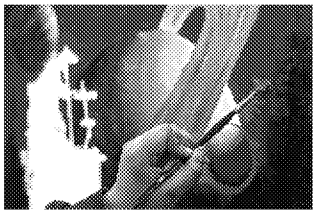

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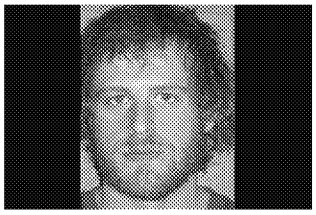

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