UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF
SOLID WASTE AND
EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Tester:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Superfund program will be proposing to add the Anaconda Aluminum Co Columbia Falls Reduction Plant site, located in Columbia Falls, Montana, to the National Priorities List (NPL) by rulemaking. The EPA received a governor/state concurrence letter supporting the listing of this site on the NPL. Listing on the NPL provides access to federal cleanup funding for the nation's highest priority contaminated sites.

Because the site is located within your state, I am providing information to help in answering questions you may receive from your constituency. The information includes a brief description of the site and a general description of the NPL listing process.

If you have any questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Raquel Snyder, in the EPA's Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations, at (202) 564-9586. We expect the rule to be published in the Federal Register in the next several days.

Sincerely,

Mathy Stanislaus

Mathy Stanislaus
Assistant Administrator

Enclosures

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United States Environmental Protection Agency

OSWER/OSRTI
Washington, DC 20460

NATIONAL PRIORITIES LIST (NPL)

****Proposed Site****

March 2015

ANACONDA ALUMINUM CO COLUMBIA FALLS REDUCTION PLANT | **Columbia Falls, Montana** *Flathead County*

Site Location:

The Anaconda Aluminum Co Columbia Falls Reduction Plant (also called Columbia Falls Aluminum) is a primary aluminum smelting facility located in northwest Montana approximately two miles northeast of Columbia Falls, in Flathead County.

Site History:

The Anaconda Copper Mining Company built the aluminum reduction facility and began aluminum production in 1955. The Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) purchased the plant in 1978 and operated it until 1985 when it was sold to the Montana Aluminum Investor's Corporation and began operations under CFAC. In 1999, Glencore acquired the company and operated until 2009 when production stopped due to poor economic conditions for aluminum production. The property boundary currently includes approximately 3,200 acres with an operational area of approximately 950 acres. The plant is currently not in use.

Site Contamination/Contaminants:

A byproduct of the aluminum reduction process is spent potliner which is known to contain cyanide and flouride compounds that can leach into ground water. Spent potliner material was landfilled on site from approximately 1955 to approximately 1985. Other landfills located at the site received various wastes throughout the lifespan of the plant, including air scrubber sludge, likely containing fluoride compounds.

The ground water and percolation ponds at the site are contaminated with cyanide and fluoride, as well as other metals.

Potential Impacts on Surrounding Community/Environment:

Contaminants have been released into ground water beneath the site, as well as the Flathead River and Cedar Creek (both located directly adjacent to the site). Cyanide has contaminated two nearby residential wells. Other homes within the same neighborhood have domestic wells for their water source which may potentially be contaminated. Cyanide and metals, including fluoride and manganese are contaminating the Flathead River. The Flathead River is a fishery that supports a variety of fish, including the federally-designated threatened bull trout, the federally-designated sensitive westslope cutthroat trout and other species that are harvested for human consumption.

Response Activities (to date):

There have been no response activities to date.

Need for NPL Listing:

The site needs to be placed on the NPL to clean up surface water, sediment and ground water contamination. Other federal and state clean up programs were evaluated but are not viable at this time. The EPA received a letter of support for placing this site on the NPL from the state.

[The description of the site (release) is based on information available at the time the site was evaluated with the HRS. The description may change as additional information is gathered on the sources and extent of contamination. See 56 FR 5600, February 11, 1991, or subsequent FR notices.]

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.

NATIONAL PRIORITIES LIST (NPL)

WHAT IS THE NPL?

The National Priorities List (NPL) is a list of national priorities among the known or threatened releases of hazardous substances throughout the United States. The list serves as an information and management tool for the Superfund cleanup process as required under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA).The NPL is intended primarily to guide EPA in determining which sites warrant further investigation to assess the nature and extent of public health and environmental risks associated with a release of hazardous substances.

There are three ways a site is eligible for the NPL:

1. **Scores at least 28.50:**
   A site may be included on the NPL if it scores sufficiently high on the Hazard Ranking System (HRS), which EPA published as Appendix A of the National Contingency Plan. The HRS is a mathematical formula that serves as a screening device to evaluate a site's relative threat to human health or the environment. As a matter of Agency policy, those sites that score 28.50 or greater on the HRS are eligible for inclusion on the NPL. This is the most common way a site becomes eligible for the NPL.

2. **State Pick:**
   Each state and territory may designate one top-priority site regardless of score.

3. **ATSDR Health Advisory:**
   Certain other sites may be listed regardless of their HRS score, if all of the following conditions are met:

   a. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has issued a health advisory that recommends removing people from the site;
   b. EPA determines that the release poses a significant threat to public health; and
   c. EPA anticipates it will be more cost-effective to use its remedial authority than to use its emergency removal authority to respond to the site.

Sites are first proposed to the NPL in the *Federal Register*. EPA then accepts public comments for 60 days about listing the sites, responds to the comments, and places those sites on the NPL that continue to meet the requirements for listing. To submit comments, visit www.regulations.gov.

Placing a site on the NPL does not assign liability to any party or to the owner of any specific property; nor does it mean that any remedial or removal action will necessarily be taken.

For more information, please visit www.epa.gov/superfund/sites/npl/.