EPA proposes Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant site for Superfund designation (Montana)

Proposed addition to the National Priorities List is subject to a 60-day public comment period

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(Denver, Colo. – March 24, 2015) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today proposed adding the Anaconda Aluminum Company's Columbia Falls Reduction Plant (also known as the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company Plant), near Columbia Falls, Mont., to the National Priorities List (NPL) making it eligible for additional study and cleanup resources under EPA's Superfund program. The proposed listing will be subject to a 60-day public review and comment period beginning on March 26. Superfund is the federal program that investigates and cleans up the country's most complex, uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites to protect public health and the environment.

The proposed Superfund site, located approximately two miles northeast of Columbia Falls, operated as a primary aluminum reduction facility between 1955 and 2009. Contaminants detected at the site include cyanide, fluoride and metals, including arsenic, chromium, lead, and selenium. These contaminants are present in soils, surface ponds, and groundwater at the site and pose a risk to nearby wells and the Flathead River. EPA and the State of Montana have determined that a comprehensive investigation of the site is necessary to inform effective cleanup actions to address these risks.

"EPA will continue to work closely with the local community, the state of Montana, and the Columbia Falls Aluminum Company to ensure a comprehensive investigation of the site is completed," said Shaun McGrath, EPA's regional administrator in Denver. "These efforts will identify cleanup actions needed to address human health and environmental concerns and will advance the community's interest in the redevelopment of this important property along the Flathead River."

The City of Columbia Falls supports the addition of the Columbia Falls Aluminum Plant site to the NPL and Montana Governor Steve Bullock has concurred. Senator Jon Tester and numerous community organizations have also expressed their support. EPA will carefully evaluate all public comments received on the proposed listing before making a final decision.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of the enactment of the Comprehensive Environmental, Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), the law establishing the Superfund program. Superfund's passage was a giant step forward in cleaning up legacy industrial waste sites to help ensure human health and environmental protection. The Superfund law gives EPA the authority to clean up releases of hazardous substances with the goal of returning them to productive use.

The NPL contains the nation's most serious uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites. The list serves as the basis for prioritizing both enforcement actions and long-term EPA

Superfund cleanup funding; only sites on the NPL are eligible for such funding. A site's listing neither imposes a financial obligation on EPA nor assigns liability to any party.

The Superfund program has provided important benefits for people and the environment since Congress established the program in 1980. Those benefits are both direct and indirect, and include reduction of threats to human health and ecological systems in the vicinity of Superfund sites, improvement of economic conditions and quality of life in communities affected by hazardous waste sites, prevention of future releases of hazardous substances, and advances in science and technology.

For more information, including how to comment on the proposed listing, visit:
http://www2.epa.gov/region8/columbia-falls-aluminum-reduction-plant