



Argonaut Mine

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Jackson, California

EPA Conducting Assessment of Argonaut Mine

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is continuing with an assessment of areas near the Argonaut Mine, a 65-acre former gold mine tailings disposal area located along Argonaut Lane in Jackson (see figure on back). The main area of concern is a 5-acre section which was used to store unprocessed and semi-processed ore (Ore Storage Area) that has very high levels of arsenic. A secondary area of concern is 6 ½ acres where the old cyanide processing plant is located because the plant and associated structures contain hazardous waste. Additionally, EPA will be assessing two dams on the property because they are old and worn and may allow contamination to flow off the property.

What is the Purpose of this Assessment?

Although the mine property is fenced off along the roads, there are locations where the public can access the site unimpeded. Some areas have very high concentrations of arsenic, lead and mercury and can present a potential health risk to the community. In addition, large sink holes have opened up where ground has collapsed near the center of the site and are very unsafe.

EPA's goal is to remove or otherwise control soil from the 5-acre tailings pile so that it does not migrate off the property and spread contamination to residential or public areas or areas of sensitive habitat. Additionally, hazardous wastes will be removed from the concrete tanks and other equipment in the cyanide plant. Precautions will be taken to preserve any historical mining structures. The assessment will also include some sampling of residential soil to determine if contamination is affecting private yards. EPA also wants to prevent contamination from releasing in runoff into Jackson Creek.

Along with the above "removal" assessment where EPA is taking quick action to eliminate a possible imminent and substantial threat to public health, another EPA assessment team will be working simultaneously at the site. This second assessment will look at the mine and mill sites which are located ½ mile north of the Argonaut Mine tailings disposal site to determine if they present enough of a hazard to warrant more long-term federal funding and action.

What Will Happen and When?

During the week of September 23, EPA will meet with tree and brush removal companies to plan for the removal of vegetation around the concrete dam located at the bottom of the site so the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) can continue their inspection that started this past July. USACE will also inspect the earthen dam and large sink holes located near the center of the site. The inspections of these dams are to determine how well they will hold up and prevent the free flow of contamination from the site.

In conjunction with USACE activities, EPA will meet with drilling and concrete coring companies to plan for the collection of core samples from four boreholes ranging from 45 to 80 feet in depth from tailings near both dams. Four cores will also be taken from the concrete dam. All of these core samples will help USACE determine the structural integrity of the dams. The drilling, concrete coring and brush removal activities will occur in November 2013.

Additionally, EPA will take soil samples on several residential properties north of the Ore Storage Area as the soils there have similar characteristics to those on the site and have shown high concentrations of arsenic in past inspections. Other residential properties that appear most vulnerable to migrating contaminated soil will be sampled following discussions with property owners. Nearby Argonaut High School and Jackson Junior High School will also be sampled.

How Will the Problem Be Solved?

Work to actually eliminate significant threats to public health and the environment will be done in the Spring of 2014. This would most likely include consolidating contaminated soils from all sources both on and off-site on the 5-acre parcel. The highly acidic soils would need to be neutralized with lime. A vegetative cover would then be constructed over contaminated soils and a drainage system installed that would route surface water runoff away from the tailings pile. If contamination from the tailings piles is found in residential

yards at levels that pose a risk, EPA would work with the property owners on a plan for removing the contaminated soil and replacing it with clean soil. Landscaping would be replaced so as to be as close as possible to what it was before.

For More Information

EPA will continue to advise the community about activities related to this site as we move forward. In the meantime, please feel free to contact either person listed below if you have questions or comments. We are especially interested in hearing from anyone who may have information on historic or cultural resources associated with the Argonaut Mine area (i.e., Indian sites, burial grounds, mining structures and artifacts). **If you would like to be on a notification list for future information about EPA's work at this site, please contact Vicki Rosen and provide your mailing address and/or email address.** Thank you.

U.S. EPA

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Argonaut Mine Site