

Site Update Pride of the West Mill



Operational Period

May 21-22, 2021

Current Situation

On May 11, 2021, the Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety (DRMS) inspected several structures at the former Pride of the West mill. This inspection identified numerous drums, bags, and containers in various states of integrity. In addition, an estimated 44 drums of sodium cyanide were discovered. Sodium cyanide reacts with acids and water to form hydrogen cyanide, a very toxic gas.

On May 17, 2021, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) notified EPA of their concern for unsecured chemicals at the Site and requested assistance.

EPA deployed a response team to the Site on May 21, 2021. This action is not connected to any planned or ongoing remedial work at the Bonita Peak Mining District Superfund Site. That Team is currently conducting a removal evaluation at the Site. This removal evaluation is expected to be completed by May 28, 2021.

Site Description

The Pride of the West mill facility is located approximately four miles to the northeast and upstream of Silverton, Colorado along the Animas River. The mill facility is not in operation and consists of several structures situated within a steep river valley along Animas Forks Rd/Rt. 2.

Site Objectives

- Safety of the public and response personnel is top priority.
- Assess and stabilize the source area to prevent the incident from worsening.
- Minimize or, if possible, eliminate threats to human health and/or the environment posed by the release/discharge.
- Provide timely and accurate communication of response information to the public, on-site media, and affected stakeholders.

Safety Message

EPA will adhere to all CDC and local recommendations pertaining to COVID-19 during the site work.

All relevant safety precautions will be followed when conducting the assessment of unknown drums/containers. Many containers are reported to be corrosive and are leaking. Possible Asbestos-Containing-Material was noted in at least two buildings (with at least one building reported to have damaged/flaking material).

Operational Period Objectives

EPA's Operational Objectives from May 21-22, 2021 were to:

- Deploy response resources.
- Make initial entries into the structures identified by DRMS and determine conditions.
- Secure the Site to prevent access to buildings containing drums and containers.
- Establish public website and reporting process to keep stakeholders and the public informed.

Current Activities

EPA deployed 2 On-Scene Coordinators (OSCs), 2 ERRS Contractors and 3 START Contractors to the Site on May 21, 2021. The Team stationed a communications trailer at the Site and conducted a brief reconnaissance of the area without entering any of the structures.

On May 22, 2021 EPA entered the Leach Plant, Mill and Laboratory. EPA removed 4 locks in total and opened several doors to ventilate each building. START conducted a screening level assessment of air quality and physical hazards. EPA subsequently entered each of these buildings with a larger group and verified numerous drums, bags, and containers in various states of integrity. At one location in the Mill, caustic material from several drums was observed to be leaking and corroding steel support beams in a floor separating two levels.

The weather was cool and rainy all day. Initial observations indicated that water pooled in the basement of the Mill building and was likely the result of a leaking drainpipe from the roof as opposed to a groundwater source.

All locks damaged by EPA during entry and ventilation were replaced. EPA also added a lock to one door at the Mill that did not exist to secure the Site.

Planned Activities (May 23-26)

- Determine if additional drums and containers exist in the remaining structures at the Site.
- Inventory all drums and containers at the Site.
- Determine the contents of drums and containers using existing labels to the extent practical and obtain relevant safety documentation from manufactures.
- Perform HazCat analyses to determine the properties and compatibility of those drums or containers with unknown or questionable contents.
- Segregate drums and containers within each building according to compatible chemical properties (acids vs bases for example).