

Site Update Pride of the West Mill



Operational Period

May 25-28, 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.

An EPA response team conducted an evaluation of the Site on May 21-28, 2021. The team identified hazardous substances in numerous old drums and containers that pose a threat of release. There are drums and containers with chemicals that do not match their labels and many containers are unlabeled. Many of the drums are leaking and or compromised. EPA anticipates conducting an emergency response action in late June to remove drums and containers once suitable disposal facilities have been identified.

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 25-28, 2021 were to:

1. Complete inventory of drums and containers in the Mill and the Office/Shop.
2. Complete inventory of drums and containers outside the buildings.
3. Complete all hazard classification tests of unknown chemicals to inform disposal.
4. Secure the buildings to prevent unauthorized entry until the drums and containers are removed.

Current Activities

EPA completed its inventory and sampling of drums and containers in the Mill, Office/Shop and outside areas. Several drums spiked air measurements for cyanide and the Response Team worked with air tanks. A special thanks to San Juan County Fire for refilling our tanks. A total of 664 drums and containers were inventoried.

EPA completed 101 hazard classification analyses to inform future disposal efforts. The contents of the drums and containers were categorized by the type of waste. Compatibility tests (carefully mixing small amounts of chemicals) were performed on each waste stream and samples were collected for laboratory analysis.

The windows in the laboratory were boarded up and locks were placed or verified on each door of the Leach Plant, Mill, Lab and Office/Shop.

Planned Activities

1. Determine suitable disposal facilities.
2. Conduct regular visits to the Site to monitor site conditions.
3. Develop an Action Memo and then conduct a CERCLA Removal Action to collect and dispose of all drums and containers.

EPA will distribute the next Site Update in several weeks prior to initiating the Removal Action.