

SUPERFUND

Fact Sheet

Talache Tailings Site, Atlanta, Idaho



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

MAY 1999

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking comments on alternatives for cleaning up part of the Talache Tailings site. These cleanup alternatives are for the upper and lower tailings piles at the site. Another area called the "depositional area" will be the subject of a separate cleanup action at a later date.

EPA will hold a meeting to discuss the alternatives if sufficient interest is expressed by the public. If you are interested in a public meeting contact Fran Allans at 208/378-5775, Jean Baker at 206/553-2587, or toll-free at 800/424-4372 by May 24.

EPA will select a cleanup alternative after reviewing and considering comments received during the public comment period. A written response to significant comments will be prepared and made available to the public in the information repository.

The Engineering Evaluation/Cost Analysis (EE/CA)

Descriptions of the various alternatives for how to clean up the two tailings piles are contained in a document called an EE/CA in which the effectiveness, implementability, and cost of each potential cleanup alternative is analyzed. The object of the cleanup is to prevent potential health effects by preventing people from being exposed to arsenic by direct contact and incidental ingestion from surface soil and tailings. In addition, the cleanup will reduce risks from chemicals in tailings and soil for plants and animals; and prevent releases to the environment including wetlands and waters that support fish and other aquatic life.

COMMENT PERIOD

You are encouraged to comment on the cleanup alternatives in writing during the public comment period from May 17, to June 16, 1999. Comments should be sent to:

Fran Allans, Project Manager
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Idaho Operations Office
1435 North Orchard Street
Boise, Idaho 83706

The Five Alternatives

Alternative 1 is the no action alternative. This alternative is included only as a basis for comparison. Cost would be approximately \$231,000 for 30 years of monitoring.

Alternative 2, EPA's preferred alternative, consists of stabilizing the piles in-place by buttressing the exterior slopes of the upper and lower tailings piles, regrading the upper and lower tailings surfaces, placing a soil cover, revegetating, and controlling water running onto and off the piles with diversion ditches. Estimated capital and operational costs \$2,488,000.

Alternative 3 consists of stabilizing the lower pile by constructing a new containment buttress/dike, relocating/regrading a majority of the tailings from the upper pile to the lower pile behind the new dike, placing a soil cover over the entire area, revegetating, and controlling water running onto and off the piles with diversion ditches. Estimated capital and operational costs \$4,023,000.

Alternative 4 consists of consolidating and stabilizing the piles by moving the lower tailings pile to the upper tailings pile, using the sandy portion of the lower tailings material to buttress the upper tailings pile, placing a soil cover, revegetating, and controlling water running onto and off the piles with diversion ditches. Estimated capital and operational costs \$3,242,000.

Alternative 5 involves constructing a repository, transporting and placing the tailings from the upper and lower tailings piles within the repository, placing a soil cover, revegetating, and reclaiming the existing tailings piles site. Estimated capital and operational costs \$9,314,000.

Alternatives 2,3, and 4 may require treatment of water from seeps at the tailings piles if further investigations indicate that treatment is necessary. If treatment is considered necessary, seep water would be treated with a passive aeration system. In addition, institutional controls to ensure long-term protectiveness is a common element to alternatives 2,3,4, and 5.

The Preferred Alternative

Alternative 2, buttressing the lower and upper tailings piles in-place, regrading, soil cover, revegetating, and controlling water running onto and off the piles with diversion ditches is EPA's preferred alternative. The primary benefits of alternative 2 over alternatives 3,4,and 5 are that it is more effective in the short term, more easily implemented, and lower in cost. Alternative 2 is equally protective of human health and the environment as these alternatives. Alternative 1, no action, does not protect human health and the environment.

Background

The Talache Mine is located near Atlanta in an area where mines have been operating for more than one hundred years resulting in the upper and lower tailings piles which have blown out on numerous occasions over the years. The upper tailings pile blew out on May 15, 1997, flowed through the lower pile below, and on into the valley. The area below the lower tailings pile where tailings were deposited as a result of the 1997 release is known as the "depositional area." The tailings were released over approximately 80 acres including upland meadows and a major wetland, and into two creeks and the Middle Fork of the Boise River. The release covers both private property and property owned by the United States Forest Service (USFS). Arsenic is the most significant of several metals present in the tailings at high concentrations and represents a potential threat to both human health and the environment.

Previous EPA Cleanup Activities

An estimated 8,060 cubic yards of tailings were removed from stream beds, banks, open areas within the wetlands and meadows, and all areas where people were most likely to be exposed. The materials were collected and moved onto the lower tailings pile. Exposed areas were either replanted with native species or seeded with an appropriate mix. A thousand bales of hay were strategically placed to keep the soil and sediment from moving. Repairs to both the upper and lower piles were made, including the installation of drainage pipes to minimize erosion. Five existing sediment and water catch basins were cleaned and reinforced; an additional basin was added to the system; and the water diversions systems were made permanent with concrete diversions structures. All activities were coordinated with the USFS, the Idaho Division of Environmental Quality, and the U.S. Department of the Interior.

For More Information

Copies of the EE/CA and other documents pertaining to the Talache site are available for your review at the Atlanta Post Office; and at EPA's Boise Office, 1435 North Orchard Street.

If you have questions please call

Fran Allans, Project Manager at 208/378-5775,
Jean Baker, Community Involvement Coordinator, at 206/553-2587

or call EPA's toll-free number 800/424/4372

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting one of the numbers listed above.



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

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