



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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EPA proposes adding Anaconda Copper Mining Co. Smelter and Refinery to Superfund site list

Listing on NPL would make cleanup at ACM Smelter and Refinery a high priority

(Denver, Colo. – March 4, 2010) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with support from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), today announced its proposal to add the Anaconda Copper Mining Co. Smelter and Refinery site in Black Eagle, Cascade County, Montana, to the National Priorities List (NPL) of Superfund sites.

Today's announcement, which is being published in the Federal Register, begins a sixty-day public comment period on the proposed listing.

The NPL is a list of sites across the nation that are contaminated with hazardous substances which pose a risk to public health and the environment. The Superfund Program was created to address these risks and return the sites to beneficial use.

The area being considered for addition to the National Priorities List contains contamination from historic smelting and refining activities at Anaconda Copper Mining Company's Great Falls Reduction Department. Smelting and Refining of Copper from Butte mines and milling other specialty metals spanned more than 80 years. Primary products from activities at the site were copper, zinc, arsenic, and cadmium. The community of Black Eagle was founded in 1882 by workers at the nearby Great Falls Refinery. It is located just north of Great Falls.

The five areas being considered for investigation and potential cleanup include:

- residential soils
- the former smelter site
- areas along the railroad bed
- Missouri River sediments and surface water
- groundwater

Over the years, wastes at the ACM site were placed in a landfill on-site or dumped directly into the Missouri River. Tailings and slag were dumped into the River from a tramway that ran along the riverbank below the Black Eagle dam raceway. Smelter operation at the Refinery site employed a 502-foot-tall plant stack for several years before pollution control technology was common. Such a stack allowed contaminants to be aerially dispersed over a wide area in the vicinity of the facility.

Recent sampling (2007, 2008) shows elevated levels of arsenic, lead, and cadmium in residential soils – EPA’s primary concern. Past analytical results (2003) documented the presence of metals on the smelter site, in Missouri River sediments and surface water, and along the railroad bed, including antimony, arsenic, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, iron, lead, manganese, mercury, nickel, silver, sodium, and zinc.

If EPA finalizes the proposed Superfund listing of ACM Smelter and Refinery, it would make the Site eligible for funds to fully investigate and oversee a comprehensive cleanup of the contamination. It would also provide opportunities for technical assistance to local residents, the Town of Black Eagle and Cascade County.

Based on recent investigations, meetings with local officials and Black Eagle community members, EPA and DEQ determined that Superfund listing will be the best process to ensure this comprehensive risk assessment and cleanup. Cascade County, the Black Eagle community and the Governor of Montana support placement of the ACM Smelter and Refinery site on the NPL.

“This is another example of Montana’s restoration economy at work,” said Governor Brian Schweitzer. “For every dollar of Superfund cleanup, two and a half dollars gets pumped into the local economy. The Superfund listing is not just good business and a cleaner environment for Montana but also important to the Black Eagle community.”

Director of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Richard Opper, said “The DEQ is excited about the proposed NPL listing and continuing work with the EPA in the spirit of collaboration on federal Superfund site remediation,” said DEQ Director Richard Opper. “We’re encouraged that the community wholeheartedly supports this listing and look forward to helping them reach their goals.”

“Moving forward with proposed listing enables officials and staff from all the agencies involved to move ahead cooperatively on sampling properties and identifying areas that need to be cleaned up. We will continue to work closely with the local community and government representatives to make this cleanup successful.” said Joe Vranka, Superfund Branch Chief in the EPA Montana Office.

More information about the site can be obtained by visiting the following Web site:
www.epa.gov/region8/superfund/mt/acmsmelterrefinery

Or, by viewing records at the following locations:

U.S. EPA Montana Office
Superfund Records Center
10 W 15th St. Suite 3200
Helena, MT 59626
(406) 457-5046
or (406) 457-5000

Cascade County Courthouse Annex
325 2nd Ave. North
Great Falls, MT 59401
(406) 454-6810

The public comment period on this proposal (FDMS Docket # EPA-HQ-SFUND-2010-0072) is open from March 4 to May 4, 2010. Those interested in commenting on the proposed NPL listing can submit comments in the following ways:

ON-LINE: Go to www.regulations.gov and follow the online instructions for submitting comments using FDMS Docket # EPA-HQ-SFUND-2010-0072.

BY EMAIL: Email written comments referring to FDMS Docket # EPA-HQ-SFUND—2010-0072, to: superfund.docket@epa.gov

BY REGULAR MAIL: Send written comments referring to FDMS Docket # EPA-HQ-SFUND-2010-0072, to:

Docket Coordinator, Headquarters
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
CERCLA Docket Office (Mail Code – 5305T)
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington D.C. 20460
(202) 566-0276

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Site Background

The Boston & Montana Consolidated Copper and Silver Mining Company began construction of the first smelter at the refinery site in 1892. Operations began in 1893 when copper ore from mines in Butte, Montana was concentrated, smelted, and refined into blister copper. In time, this refinery came to construct and operate the tallest plant stack in the world, more than 502 feet high. Electrolytic and furnace refineries also operated at the site.

The property was acquired by Anaconda Copper Mining Company in 1910 and renamed the Great Falls Reduction Department. Copper was made into commercially useful shapes. Smelting activities continued at the facility until the early 1970s. The property again changed hands in 1977, when these holdings were purchased by Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO). Primary products from activities at the site were copper, zinc, arsenic, and cadmium.

The community of Black Eagle was founded in 1882 by workers at the nearby Great Falls Refinery. The community was originally known as Martinville. The older established section of Black Eagle lies between U.S. Highway 87 and the Anaconda Minerals Company (AMC) Great Falls Refinery.

