

EPA ORGANIZATION

Internal deliberative pre-decisional - FOR USE BY 2024 PRESIDENT-ELECT TRANSITION TEAM MEMBERS ONLY

ISSUE SUMMARY:

Tar Creek Superfund Site, OK

The Tar Creek Superfund Site consists of former lead and zinc mines located in northeast Oklahoma on the Kansas/Missouri border. Beginning in 1891 and continuing into the 1970s, mining and associated activities resulted in more than 75 million cubic yards of lead, cadmium, and zinc contaminated mine waste ("chat") left in "chat piles" concentrated over a 40-square mile area, dumped in area streams, and distributed throughout the 485 square miles of Ottawa County for residential and commercial purposes. Since the site was included on the National Priorities List in 1983, EPA and the state, community, and tribal stakeholders have made great progress in mitigating human health and environmental risks posed by the site; however, much work remains. To date, approximately \$600 million, including \$51.6 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding, has been spent on site cleanup activities and EPA estimates that cleanup work will continue for at least 50 more years. EPA, in partnership with the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) and the Quapaw Nation, has completed remediation of over 3,000 residential properties, relocated four communities, remediated over 10 million tons of mining waste and affected soils, and plugged approximately 85 abandoned ground water wells. Because of these activities, approximately 2,500 acres of land have been remediated and approximately 5,500 acres of private and tribal lands are ready for reuse. There have been significant reductions in blood lead levels in children, with only 3.2% of the children tested and residing in Ottawa County having blood lead levels above the current CDC reference level of 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood ($\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$). Historically, 35% of Ottawa County children had blood-lead levels exceeding the prior reference level of 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$. EPA issued new residential lead guidance in 2024 that will require more testing for lead in soil and likely more remediation. EPA Regions 6 and 7 continue to investigate the watersheds impacted by mining from both regions, covering an estimated 1,100 square miles and 300 miles of rivers/tributaries. The remedial investigation/feasibility study and human health risk assessment are ongoing. Tribal lifeway (traditional practices and customs) exposure scenarios are being evaluated, and preliminary remediation goals are under development, as well as a prioritization scheme for early and interim actions for the watershed cleanup.

KEY POINTS:

- Significant progress has been made in cleaning up the Tar Creek Superfund Site, in large part due to the partnership between EPA, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, and the Quapaw Nation, but much work remains.
- Blood lead levels in children near the Tar Creek Site have been significantly reduced and new residential lead screening levels will result in even greater reductions of lead in children's blood.
- EPA Regions 6 and 7 are working together to assess contamination in the 1,100 square mile watershed of the Tri-State Mining District and will release an updated cleanup strategy and update the Memorandum of Understanding between the Regions for the TSMD watersheds in fiscal year 2025.

ONGOING/UPCOMING REVIEWS FOR FY2024:

- The Tar Creek Strategic Plan, first produced in 2019 to advance cleanup of this site, will be updated with input from Tar Creek Site stakeholders and released in FY25.
- A five-year review of the protectiveness of the Tar Creek Site's remedies will be conducted in FY24 and completed by July of 2025.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

- | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Congress | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> States | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tribes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Media | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other Federal Agency |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NGO | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local Governments | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public | | | |

MOVING FORWARD:

- EPA Region 6 is working in partnership with Tar Creek Site stakeholders to revise the strategic plan for cleaning up the Tar Creek Superfund Site.
- EPA Region 6 is also working in partnership with Oklahoma State Department of Health, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, Quapaw Nation, Cherokee Nation, Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, Seneca-Cayuga Nation, and Wyandotte Nation in revising residential lead screening levels and any associated cleanup levels to further protect children from exposure to lead in residential soil.
- EPA Regions 6 and 7 will release a combined Human Health Risk Assessment for the Tri-State Mining District watershed in FY26 and a combined feasibility study for watershed cleanup will be released in 2027.