



Date: July 9, 2009

General questions: (DHS) Jim Sellers, 503-945-5738, (EPA) Judy Smith 503-326-6994

Technical questions: (DHS) Dave Farrer, 971-673-0971; (EPA) Denise Baker-Kircher, 206-553-4303

New report addresses health risks associated with Douglas County mine

The abandoned Formosa Mine Superfund Site in Douglas County poses no risk to the drinking water supply for residents of Riddle, Oregon. But if hikers, campers, hunters or other recreational users in the area drink the water near the mine, it would pose a health hazard, according to state officials.

The new report was issued by the Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP) in the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division. Principal findings:

- The waters of Cow Creek, including public water intake for the City of Riddle, show no signs of contamination from the mine and therefore pose no apparent health hazard to those who drink it.
- Significant water contamination concerns for humans extend from the uninhabited mine site downstream to the convergence of Middle Creek and South Fork creeks, upstream of Middle Creek's confluence with Cow Creek. This contamination is believed to be of greatest risk to outdoor recreationists who are most likely to visit the area. Drinking the water could cause immediate symptoms including nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and alterations in stress hormone levels due to copper and zinc toxicity.
- Drinking or bathing in water from springs on Silver Butte or from Middle or South Fork creeks upstream from their confluence poses a public health hazard. People with pre-existing liver disease, especially a genetic disorder known as Wilson's Disease, could experience severe and irreversible liver damage after drinking water from the mine site. Individuals who take high doses of copper or zinc in dietary supplements are also especially sensitive.

The Formosa Mine operated periodically between 1927 and 1994, with most mining operations occurring between 1990 and 1994. The site is located near the top of Silver Butte, 25 miles south of Roseburg and seven miles south of Riddle.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) added the Formosa Mine, an underground copper and zinc mine, to the National Priorities List in 2007 primarily because of risks to the area's fish and wildlife, with human health risks of secondary concern.

EPA has started a remedial investigation and feasibility study that will lead to a final cleanup plan for the site. EPA plans to conduct additional sampling this summer to gather information needed to protect human health and the environment.

The full EHAP report is online at www.healthoregon.org/ehap and also is available at the Riddle branch of the Douglas County Public Library, 637 First Ave., Riddle. Anyone wishing to comment on the report may do so by writing EHAP, Suite 640, 800 N.E. Oregon St., Portland, OR 97232 or by e-mail addressed to info.ehap@state.or.us.

EHAP became involved at the site because of its mandate to investigate human health risks associated with Superfund sites throughout Oregon. EHAP's public health assessment focused exclusively on potential risks posed to human health from exposure to the site.

It is unknown whether eating fish or wild game caught in the area poses a health risk, because no information is available. However, few fish are available to anglers in the affected streams because of the toxic effects of copper on aquatic life. EHAP recommends that anglers and hunters refrain from eating fish caught from Middle or South Fork Creek and from eating the internal organs of game animals caught in the area until further data are available.