



September 2023 Superfund Update

Recent and Upcoming Activities

Human Health Exposure Assessment by ATSDR

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) will hold a public meeting on September 26th to discuss health concerns regarding arsenic exposure in Butte. Arsenic is one of the primary contaminants determined to be a risk to people in Butte, along with lead and mercury. The goal of the Superfund cleanup is to reduce that risk. Lead has been tested widely by using blood lead tests and lead human health exposures are documented in the health studies completed in 2014 and 2020. Arsenic and mercury exposures have been tested much less and there are concerns that exposure to these metals needs further assessment. The ATSDR is evaluating whether a community wide exposure study should be performed.

The September 26th meeting is at the Maroon Activity Center, 550 E Mercury St, from 1:30-7:30 PM. People can stop by anytime during those hours to share their concerns and get further information. ATSDR will review information provided by the public along with other site information and will hold a second meeting in the future to discuss their findings and any health study that may occur.

The ATSDR is separate from EPA and is under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR focuses on minimizing human health risks associated with exposure to hazardous substances as an advisory, nonregulatory agency.

Stormwater Treatment at Uncontrolled Surface Flow Areas

Butte has many different watersheds that drain into Silver Bow and Blacktail Creeks. When heavy rain and snowmelt create runoff in these watersheds, heavy metals from abandoned mines, waste, and naturally mineralized areas can be drawn into the storm flow. Superfund cleanup will cap mining waste to protect people from direct exposure, but runoff still manages to pick up metals which flow towards the creeks.

Stormwater treatment ponds were built in the 1990s in Missoula Gulch and new ponds will be constructed for Buffalo Gulch, East Buffalo Gulch, and the Upper Silver Bow Creek watersheds in the coming years. There are many smaller watersheds that require assessment for stormwater runoff treatment under the Butte Priority Soils Consent Decree. These are referred to as “Uncontrolled Surface Flow Areas.” Atlantic Richfield has indicated in recent design documents they have had limited success collecting water quality data to pinpoint where in those smaller watersheds runoff collection and treatment are needed. Instead they propose to assume that stormwater treatment is needed and plan to design stormwater “best management practices” (BMPs) for these watersheds. The BMPs will treat typical storm runoff, what is referred to as the 6-month, 24-hour storm event. The specific treatment methods to be used will be tailored to each watershed and plans are being developed.

Park and Playground Remediation

Atlantic Richfield has removed contaminated soil at several parks and neighborhood playgrounds this summer. The soils are being addressed under a 2020 order by EPA that requires every park and playground within the Superfund site to be tested and remediated if it exceeds residential action levels for mining contaminants. Residential action levels are the lowest and safest cleanup levels that are used. Where soil exceeds the action level, the soil is removed, lime is placed to buffer soil acidity and covered with a protective geosynthetic barrier, 18 inches of clean soil is backfilled, and the park or playground features rebuilt. Stodden, Clark, Rocker, Koprivica, Copper/Emmett, and Cherokee Parks will see soil cleanup this year.

Photos showing before and after soil cleanup at Koprivica and Copper Emmett parks (courtesy of Atlantic Richfield)



Upcoming Activity Schedule

Atlantic Richfield plans to begin construction of the Lexington Wetlands community park this month. This is not a Superfund cleanup because no contaminant risk was found to be present. The park will be part of the larger creek corridor park system “end land use” that Atlantic Richfield has planned.

It is anticipated that Atlantic Richfield will reissue the Grove Gulch stormwater treatment basin 95% design in September. Construction of that project is likely to be in 2024 now.