



# Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site

Borough of Palmerton, Carbon County,  
Pennsylvania

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region III

December 1996

## **EPA Regional Administrator Holds Press Conference**

On October 16, 1996, W. Michael McCabe, EPA Region III Regional Administrator, held a press conference at Stoney Ridge to update area residents and local media about the most recent activities occurring at the Palmerton Zinc Superfund Site, in Palmerton, Pennsylvania.

EPA discussed the completion of legal agreements with 32 area homeowners, and the status of EPA's home clean-up program. These legal agreements provide residents with a strong defense under Federal law from anyone who attempts to sue them for costs related to cleaning contaminated properties. Many Palmerton homeowners have been concerned that the potentially responsible parties (PRPs), those individuals or companies EPA holds responsible for contaminating the site, may sue them to recover their costs.

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During the press conference, one individual alleged that several residents who had accepted EPA's interim clean-up action had deliberately provided false information in order to qualify for the cleanup. Intentionally deceiving the U.S. Government is a crime. EPA's Office of Inspector General in Region III investigates such allegations. However, EPA has not seen evidence of this alleged fraud and does not believe it played a part in or affected the clean-up process.

The purpose of EPA's cleanup is to protect individuals especially vulnerable to lead exposure (pregnant women and young children). Given any uncertainties, EPA has and will take action to protect residents from current or potential exposure to contaminants known to be at the site. EPA has interviewed and has had personal contact with hundreds of Palmerton citizens over the years. EPA believes that, despite differing opinions on the cleanup, Palmerton citizens are forthright and honest. EPA has sampled and continues to sample residences to determine if contami-

nation is present before considering those residences eligible for clean up.

## **Update on Home Clean-up Program**

Community interest in the home clean-up program has been and remains high. By the end of 1996, EPA will have cleaned 141 homes in the Palmerton area. EPA expects 1997 to be the fourth and final year for the interim action. Residents should contact EPA as soon as possible to schedule testing.

In 1991, one of the PRPs agreed to clean 24 of the contaminated homes in Palmerton. However, homeowners later informed EPA that this PRP stated it reserved the right to sue these homeowners to reimburse clean-up costs, claiming the zinc polluter had not caused the pollution in the homes. This PRP claimed the pollution came from lead paint in the house; EPA later disproved this allegation. Because of this threat of legal action, many homeowners elected not to have their homes cleaned.

EPA began its own clean-up program in April 1994. Under an interim action agreement, EPA sampled homes and properties for lead, cadmium, and zinc. Next, EPA removed the contamination from the homes and properties, as necessary. However, participation in the clean-up program by residents was completely voluntary. EPA was most concerned with homes where pregnant women and children under age six were living, since they are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning.

## **Review of Feasibility Study**

EPA has received the draft Feasibility Study for Operable Unit No. 3 from its contractor. Operable Unit No. 3 addresses the contamination the smelter caused during its operations. These smelting operations emitted and deposited heavy metals into off-site soils.

Currently, EPA is reviewing the results of this study. EPA expects to complete this review by the end of the year.

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## PALMERTON ZINC TIME LINE OF EVENTS

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| 1898 | • Zinc smelting operations begin at Palmerton Zinc   |
| 1977 | • EPA begins investigating possible contamination at the site  |
| 1979 | • Runoff and discharge at the site studied   |
| 1980 | • EPA files Potential Hazardous Waste Site Document  |
| 1985 | • Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study(RI/FS) for OU-1 (Blue Mountain) released  |
| 1987 | • Record of Decision for OU-1 released<br>• Remedial Investigation for OU-2 (Cinder Bank) released   |
| 1988 | • Record of Decision for OU-2 released   |
| 1991 | • Cleanup of OU-1 begins<br>• Residential sampling conducted at 24 homes<br>• Technical Assistance Grant awarded to Palmerton Citizens for a Clean Environment (PCCE)<br>• Permanent mixing station and access road completed at OU-1<br>• Palmerton Environmental Task Force (PETF) created |
| 1992 | • Source Identification Study conducted<br>• Application of sludge/lime/fly ash mixture begins at OU-1<br>• Phase Two access road for OU-1 completed<br>• 350 acres of Blue Mountain revegetated<br>• Draft environmental study of contamination released                                    |
| 1993 | • EPA announces Interim Home Clean-up Action   |
| 1994 | • Residential cleanups begin; 70 residences sampled  |
| 1995 | • EPA continues home clean-up program<br>• 13.2 acres of Cinder Bank leveled to prepare for sludge application at OU-2   |
| 1996 | • EPA continues home clean-up program<br>• Aquashicola River floods area; specialists sample mud in residences<br>• Sludge application begins at OU-2<br>• Contamination on Little Gap Road identified; EPA takes action to contain contamination  |
| 1997 | • End of the Interim Action (home clean-up program)  |

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