Tar Creek Superfund Site

Community Involvement Plan Summary

In March 2025, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency shared its Community Involvement Plan for the Tar Creek Superfund Site with the community. The Plan includes detailed information about the communities in Ottawa County and cleanup activities at the site and discusses community needs, concerns and expectations. To read the Community Involvement Plan, please visit www.epa.gov/superfund/tar-creek or follow the QR code below.

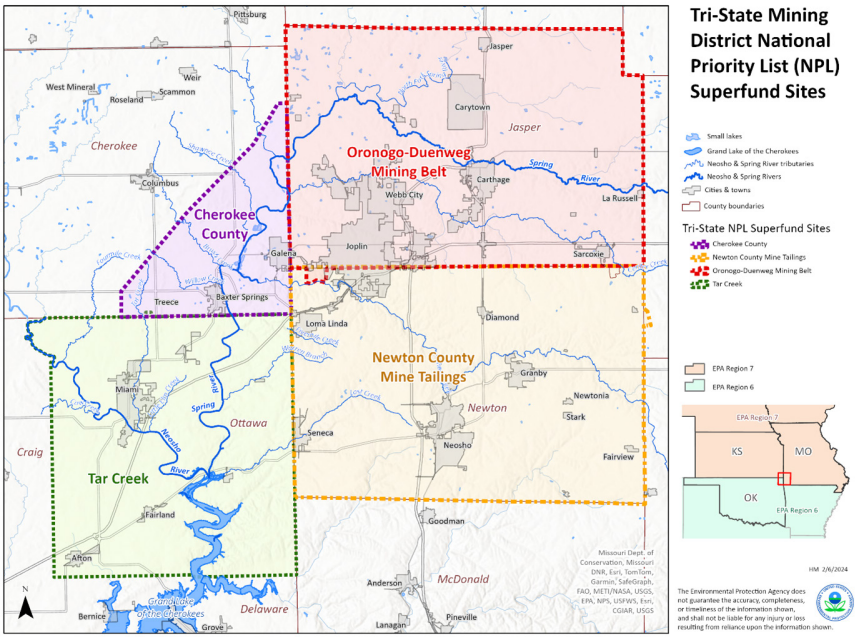

Figure 1. A map of the Tri-State Mining District.

The site is part of the Tri-State Mining District, which spans part of Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri (see map). The District was once one of the world's largest producers of lead and zinc. Mining, milling and smelting of lead and zinc ore occurred from 1885 to 1970. Mining left a legacy of open mine shafts, acid mine water, and large volumes of mining waste and milling waste contaminated with lead, zinc and cadmium. The contaminated waste was left on-site, piled as gravel-like mill tailings called "chat" or as powdery or sand-like mill tailings called "fines." Chat was used for many years as material for roads and building foundation fill for various land uses. The chat and fines released contaminants into the soil, groundwater, surface water and sediment. In 1979, water discharge from abandoned boreholes caused significant environmental impacts in Tar Creek, Lytle Creek and Beaver Creek.

To manage investigations and cleanup, the EPA divided the site into five areas, or operable units (see Table 1). As of January 2025, about 10.5 million cubic yards of mine waste and contaminated soil have been excavated. Over 5,500 acres of private and tribal lands have been remediated. Nearly 4,000 residential yards with lead contamination have been addressed. The EPA works with Tribal, state and local partners throughout the cleanup process. The Quapaw Nation works directly with the EPA under Cooperative Agreements to oversee cleanup and related activities on different parts of the site. Ongoing cleanup efforts are focused on contaminated surface water and sediment. The EPA continues to sample and remediate residential yards and high-access areas (daycare facilities, schoolyards and other areas where children may congregate). A Remedial Investigation Report published in 2023 and an ongoing feasibility study explore options for cleanup technologies to inform future cleanup plans.

Operable Unit	Cleanup Focus	Cleanup Status
OU-00	**Sitewide Activities**	Sitewide
OU-01	**Surface Water/Groundwater**	Remedial Action Complete. Oklahoma DEQ Operates and Maintains the Remedy: *Construction of dikes and diversion structures finished in 1986.*
OU-02	**Residential and High Access Areas**	Remedial Action: *Excavation of contaminated soils and cleanup is ongoing.*
OU-03	**Eagle-Picher Office Complex - Abandoned Mining Chemical Removal Action**	Remedial Action Complete. No Further Action is Required: *The EPA removed 120 containers in 2000.*
OU-04	**Chat Piles, Other Mine and Mill Waste, Smelter Wastes**	Remedial Action: *The EPA continues to collaborate with the Quapaw Nation, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and other partners to prioritize the remediation of remaining source materials.*
OU-05	**Sediment and Surface Water**	Site Characterization Underway: *Remedial investigation completed and feasibility study is ongoing.*

Table 1: Operable Units at the Tar Creek Superfund Site

To read the complete Community Involvement Plan, please visit www.epa.gov/superfund/tar-creek or scan the QR code.

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The EPA conducted interviews with the community from 2021 to 2024. These interviews informed this Community Involvement Plan and a separate report, a Technical Assistance Needs Assessment. In 2021, the EPA conducted 12 interviews by phone and a group interview with 10 Tribal environmental representatives. The EPA conducted another two interviews in 2022 to assess watershed-scale impacts at the site. As part of the EPA's five-year-review process for the site, the EPA gathered feedback from 13 more community members and Tribal, state and local partners. The findings from the three sets of interviews are summarized below.

1. Watershed Concerns

The community understands the impact of the Tri-State Mining District on Tar Creek because of watershed connections throughout the area. Community members are concerned about people using Tar Creek for recreation and being at risk of contaminant exposure. They also said that the risks associated with the consumption of wild game, fish and edible plants need to be well communicated to residents. The negative impacts of contamination in the watershed on Tribal communities and their right to subsist is a primary concern. Many people said that cleanup across the watershed is slow-moving and asked if different cleanup technologies could be considered.

2. Human Health Concerns

People shared two perspectives on the impact of contamination on human health. The Tribal lifeway perspective is that human, spiritual and environmental concerns are intertwined, suggesting that the health of the people, land, water, forests, fish and wildlife are connected. This has resulted in a change in behavior and limits to cultural practices in response to the contamination. Other residents in the area do not believe the site impacts their health. They are aware of the site and the cleanup and understand that lead is harmful but have lived with the effects. People said that there is more concern about the impact of lead on children. Community outreach on this topic is needed to better inform people about the risks associated with lead exposure.

3. Reuse/Future Land Use Concerns

Interviewees said that the contamination has prevented communities from accomplishing what they are capable of environmentally, economically and socially. Residents would like to resume hunting, fishing and gathering activities. People said that Tribal subsistence uses will always need to be considered. There is a lack of housing options for Tribes in the area. Some people would like the site's remedy to be compatible with potential residential uses in the future.

4. Cleanup Concerns

While some people said that progress is slower than anticipated, other people are satisfied with the cleanup efforts, particularly in residential yards. People worry that the condition of the environment post-cleanup has not improved, noting areas that are not easily revegetated. Some people said that the cleanup is ineffective and that they could be at risk of exposure again in the future. Residents questioned the value of the cleanup and wondered why so many resources were dedicated to areas that appeared to be degraded and inaccessible. Interviewees are concerned that the groups tasked with the cleanup have many excuses to delay the work and not complete the cleanup. Many people said that the cleanup should be consistent across the EPA's Region 6 and the EPA's Region 7 and wanted more information on the EPA's lead screening-level guidance.

5. Community Engagement Concerns

Initial interviews in 2021 indicated that the community had a distrusting relationship with the EPA. During the 2024 interviews, people noted improvements in the relationship with the EPA. They said that coordination and transparency among the EPA, Oklahoma DEQ, the Quapaw Nation and other local Tribes have improved with recent efforts. Overall, Tribes and community members feel informed about site activities and hope to continue building trust with the EPA, particularly through in-person meetings and visits.

The Community Involvement Action Plan highlights the EPA's key objectives, methods and timelines for keeping residents, community stakeholders and local officials informed and involved throughout the cleanup process. The activities and their frequency relate to the stage of the cleanup. They also reflect the level of interest expressed by people in the community. The EPA based the Community Involvement Action Plan on several factors, including the needs, concerns and recommendations identified in the community interviews.

Community Involvement Activity	Description	Frequency and Resources
Webpage	The EPA will continue to maintain a site webpage. It will provide an overview and history of the site and the EPA's involvement, share updated information about the cleanup process, and host site-related reports and documents.	Ongoing. www.epa.gov/superfund/tar-creek
Community Meetings	The EPA's staff may attend meetings held by community groups, Tribes, the local government and other organizations upon request to share information about the site and to address community questions, concerns, ideas and comments.	Ongoing. EPA will work with the community to coordinate the meetings
EPA-Hosted Events	The EPA's staff may host meetings, informal information sessions and open houses to share information with the community. Meetings will be held in person when possible or hosted virtually, in coordination with the community. The EPA's staff will provide options for people to participate by phone if they are not able to join a web-based meeting. Whenever possible, the EPA's staff will share meeting materials in advance of meetings.	Ongoing. EPA will work with the community to coordinate the meetings.
Briefings with Local Officials	The EPA's staff may brief Ottawa County staff, representatives from the Quapaw Nation and other Tribal governments on request.	Ongoing. The EPA will coordinate with more elected officials as requested.
Educational Materials	The EPA's staff may collect, prepare and distribute user-friendly documents to help people understand site conditions.	Ongoing. Materials will be distributed through regular mail and electronically through partner agency and community organization newsletters.
Periodic Updates	The EPA's staff will develop and distribute information about the Site on Facebook and other social media outlets on an as-needed basis. These materials will provide regular updates about the Superfund process, notify the public about public meetings, availability sessions and public comment periods, and provide links to publicly available documents and other resources. The EPA's staff will maintain and continue to build a site email list and address mailing list.	As needed. **EPA Region 6 Facebook:** EPA Region 6 | Facebook **EPA Region 6 X (Twitter):** EPA Region 6 X (Twitter) **EPA Region 6 News/Events Webpage:** EPA Region 6 (South Central) To join the mailing list, reach out to: **Janetta Coats** – coats.janetta@epa.gov / 214-665-7308
Formal Public Comments Period	During the Superfund process, the EPA announces and opens public comment periods and encourages people to submit formal comments on several types of documents, including Proposed Plans.	As needed for several site-specific documents, including Proposed Plans.
Information Repository	Site project information, fact sheets and other easy reference materials for the public to read are kept in local information repositories.	Ongoing. **Miami Public Library** 200 North Main Street Miami, Oklahoma 74354 (918) 542-2292 miamipl.okpls.org **Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality** 707 North Robinson – 2nd Floor Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73102 (405) 702-1188 | (405) 702-1000 www.deq.ok.gov

EPA Contacts and Links to More Site Information

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The EPA's Lead Webpages: www.epa.gov/lead, www.epa.gov/lead/learn-about-lead and www.epa.gov/superfund/lead-superfund-sites.

The EPA's Lead Awareness Curriculum: to see future events or watch a recorded event English or Spanish, visit: www.epa.gov/lead/tribal-lead-curriculum#presentations. To access the curriculum, visit www.epa.gov/lead/tribal-lead-curriculum; Contact: Marie Blankenship for more information at (913) 551-7908 and blankenship.marie@epa.gov.

The EPA's Updated Soil Lead Guidance (2024): www.epa.gov/superfund/updated-soil-lead-guidancecercla-sites-and-rcra-corrective-action-facilities.

The EPA's Updated Integrated Science Assessment for Lead (2024): www.epa.gov/isa/integrated-scienceassessment-isa-lead.

The EPA Updated Superfund Lead-Contaminated Residential Sites Handbook (2024): www.epa.gov/superfund/lead-superfund-sites-guidance#residentialsites.