



## News Advisory For Immediate Release

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US Environmental Protection Agency and  
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### The End of An Era

**EAST HELENA, MONTANA**—Friday marked the end of an era when the former Asarco manager's house in East Helena was totally lost to fire. More than eighty fire fighters responded to a grass fire near the house that, according officials, was started by a downed power line and aggravated by high winds. Within hours, the Manager's house was engulfed in flames. "We are grateful to the fire fighters who labored tirelessly through the afternoon and evening to contain the blaze and try to save the structure," said Betsy Burns of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the agency responsible for overseeing the cleanup of the former Asarco smelter. "Sadly our goal of finding a community group able and willing to assume responsibility for the restoration and long-term management of this historic structure were lost along with the manager's house on Friday." Built in 1888, the landmark home provided a gathering place for company executives and reflected the importance of the smelter to Montana's mining history, particularly to the City of East Helena.

Although the other former company houses were razed in 2010 to pave the way for cleanup of the Asarco smelter, EPA and the Montana Environmental Custodial Trust elected to preserve the century-old manager's house, hoping it could be relocated and restored along with the stretch of Prickly Pear Creek adjacent to the smelter. Since then, EPA and the Montana Trust have maintained and secured the building, which has been the target of periodic trespassing and vandalism. Until Friday, the Montana Trust was making plans to move the manager's house to a more permanent location east of the creek where it could be viewed and

enjoyed by the public. Before demolishing the other residences, EPA and the Montana Trust worked with two local non-profits—Habitat for Humanity and the Florence Crittenton Foundation—to recycle all reusable materials from the homes and farm houses.

According to Cindy Brooks, who heads the Montana Trust, “The vision has been to transform the area along Prickly Pear Creek to an enhanced, riparian area featuring walking trails and dedicated open space.”

Because of its historic and cultural significance, the former Asarco manager’s house was always a focal point of that vision. “The tragic loss of the manager’s house will not deter our commitment to transforming the area to a valuable community asset as part of the cleanup of contaminated groundwater resulting from decades of smelting operations,” stated Brooks. This year’s cleanup plans were laid out in a draft interim measures work plan, which was issued by EPA for public review and comment last month.

A leading advocate for preserving and restoring the manager’s house, East Helena Mayor Anthony Strainer expressed the sadness of many in the community. “Besides the slag pile, the manager’s house was really the last visible remnant of the Asarco smelter. The smelter helped define the heritage and values of East Helena. We will always cherish our past. But now, more than ever, we must look to the future.”

The Montana Environmental Custodial Trust assumed ownership, management, cleanup and redevelopment responsibility for the ASARCO sites in Montana, including the former East Helena smelter, when the ASARCO bankruptcy was settled in December of 2009. Cleanup of the East Helena site is being performed by the Montana Trust under direction and oversight of EPA in consultation with MDEQ. Other Trust sites include former ASARCO mines in Lincoln, Phillipsburg and Superior. The United States and the State of Montana are the beneficiaries of the Montana Custodial Trust.