



News Advisory For Immediate Release

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US Environmental Protection Agency and
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Coming Down: Former Asarco Smelter in East Helena

EAST HELENA, MONTANA— Residents and commuters driving on State Highway 12 or Smelter Road near the American Chemet facility should take one last look at the former Asarco Ore Storage and Handling Building (OSHB). That's because the massive pre-cast concrete structure—bigger than a football field and more than six stories high—is coming down. “Barring weather delays, demolition of the OSHB is slated to begin on April 8th,” according to Cindy Brooks, head of the Montana Environmental Custodial Trust, the Trustee that assumed responsibility for cleanup of the Asarco 2009. Under oversight of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Montana Trust is poised to begin construction of several measures designed to address groundwater and soil contamination resulting from a century of smelting operations. In the coming weeks, the Montana Trust also plans to remove other buildings near the OSHB, including the two green-and-yellow fabric structures—dubbed the “Barnham and Bailey” buildings because they resemble large circus tents. EPA and the Montana Trust are seeking to recycle and salvage as much material as possible from the planned demolition activities.

According to Betsy Burns, EPA Cleanup Manager for East Helena, “It’s gratifying to see demolition move forward after several years of planning and studies. This work represents an important step in the clean up the former Asarco smelter.” EPA and the Montana Trust hope to remove the remaining on-site structures by the end of next year, leaving the 14-million ton slag pile as one of the last visible remnants of the Asarco smelter. Burns also advised that, “Folks may see construction on the western side of State Highway 518 just

east of Prickly Pear Creek where power, telephone and water lines will be relocated to make way for construction of the temporary bypass channel for the section of the creek below smelter dam.” The Montana Trust has been working closely with the City of East Helena, NorthWestern Energy and Century Link on these utility projects.

The OSHB is the largest and newest building on the smelter property. In its heyday, the Asarco smelter produced lead bullion from diverse concentrates and ores from mines and facilities all over the world. In 1988 alone, Asarco received more than 200,000 tons of such raw materials—delivered by rail or truck, offloaded, stored in piles and then blended and mixed with fluxes to render them suitable for smelting. Before the OSHB was constructed in 1990, these operations took place in the outdoor storage yard or in a small, unventilated building, which generated significant, uncontrolled dust. The OSHB was designed to enclose and ventilate these operations in order to control dust emissions. The useful life of this behemoth structure was cut short after little more than a decade, when the smelter was shutdown in 2001.

The Montana 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. The Montana Trust is cleaning up the East Helena site under the oversight of EPA as Lead Agency. Other Montana 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 Trust.

For additional information about the East Helena project, please visit the Montana Trust website:

<http://www.mtenvironmentaltrust.org/east-helena>.