Cleanup of the Former ASARCO Smelter Update on Corrective Measures to Address Arsenic in Groundwater October 2020



This Fact Sheet was prepared by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Montana Environmental Trust Group (METG), LLC, Trustee of the Montana Environmental Custodial Trust, which was established as part of the ASARCO bankruptcy settlement to cleanup and facilitate the safe redevelopment of the former ASARCO lands in East Helena for the benefit of the citizens of Montana.

Cleanup Actions Taken To Date Are Protective and Effective

METG has implemented multiple cleanup actions in the last eight (8) years to address soil and groundwater contamination left by more than a century of lead smelting at the former ASARCO facility in East Helena. These cleanup efforts have resulted in conditions that EPA has concluded are protective of human health and have achieved significant improvements in groundwater quality in East Helena. This fact sheet summarizes important information about arsenic contamination in groundwater.

- The plume of arsenic from the ASARCO smelter poses no imminent health risk and is not threatening the City of East Helena's water supply.
- Data from groundwater monitoring show that the highest concentrations of arsenic in groundwater are on the former smelter property. Since METG began site cleanup in 2012, the portion of the ASARCO plume beneath the smelter property is shrinking and the portion beneath the City of East Helena remains stable (not expanding). Arsenic concentrations in groundwater on and off the smelter property have been dropping. (See Figure 1).
- The final remedies for groundwater, proposed in the Corrective Measures Study and approved by EPA in its 2020 Statement of Basis, are protective of human health and the environment.
- Installation of a water treatment system (sometimes called a "pump and treat" system) to cleanup the ASARCO arsenic plume will be no more protective of human health than the implemented and proposed remedies. Also, such a system will cleanup arsenic in groundwater no faster than the remedies being implemented in East Helena. In fact, a pump and treat system is not as beneficial for important reasons.
 - ✓ A pump and treat system would require extraction of groundwater from a network of wells, and treatment of extracted groundwater at the former smelter for decades—and likely forever.
 - ✓ Because of the volume and concentration of arsenic contamination left in the smelter groundwater and soils, it is not feasible to fully eliminate the arsenic plume through pump and treat.
 - ✓ Pump and treat systems are very expensive to construct and operate and, if installed today, will exhaust cleanup funds that <u>must be preserved for long term protection and monitoring in the East</u> <u>Helena community</u>.
- The EPA-approved groundwater remedy provides the greatest benefit to the East Helena community by
 protecting human health and the environment. The scale of environmental contamination from more
 than a century of ASARCO's operations is too large to be eliminated with the finite funds received by
 METG.
- After the final remedy is completed—re-grading and capping the ASARCO slag pile to minimize the last major source of arsenic contamination to groundwater—METG will continue to monitor groundwater conditions to make sure that cleanup goals are being achieved. Because METG has successfully, cost-effectively implemented remedies that are protective of human health and have demonstrably improved groundwater quality in East Helena, there are sufficient cleanup funds remaining if additional future actions are needed. EPA has concluded that it is not in the best interest of the clean-up to pursue a pump and treat system that would likely deplete the remaining funds.

What Is Next

Our work in East Helena is not done. METG recently submitted a draft Corrective Measures Implementation Plan to EPA outlining its proposal to regrade and cap the ASARCO slag pile to prevent arsenic (and selenium) from leaching into the groundwater in East Helena. METG is also pursuing options for the removal and recycling of the most contaminated slag source material as a way to more cost effectively attain EPA's water quality objectives and reduce the height of the pile. METG is continuing extensive groundwater monitoring to ensure contaminated groundwater is not being used; maintaining the 62-acre evapotranspiration (ET) cover system installed over the entire former smelter area; and completing realignment of the Prickly Pear Creek channel. Cleanup funds have been utilized in a conservative manner and, if required, there will be funding to implement additional groundwater remedies in the future.



For more information about the East Helena Project, please contact: Betsy Burns, EPA Remedial Project Manager, at 406-457-5013 Cindy Brooks, Montana Environmental Custodial Trust Director, at 617-448-9762 Visit the Montana Environmental Custodial Trust website at: <u>www.mtenvironmentaltrust.org</u>