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Lane County Black Butte Mine Public Health Assessment released, open for public comment

Oregon Public Health Division released a health assessment report on Black Butte Mine that identified potential health risks to nearby communities. The public can provide comment by July 25.

Black Butte Mine, about 11 miles south of Cottage Grove, is a former mercury mine that operated from the late 1890s through the late 1960s. In 1998, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) inspected the site and identified mercury and arsenic as contaminants of concern. In March 2010, the former mine was listed as a Superfund site.

The three main public health concerns are:

- the levels of mercury in Cottage Grove Reservoir fish,
- the tailings that may have been hauled off site and used for construction throughout the state,
- and the potential for naturally occurring arsenic contamination in area ground water.

According to Todd Hudson, MSPH, Oregon Public Health toxicologist, eating fish from Cottage Grove Reservoir continues to pose potentially serious health risks. "There has been a fish advisory at the reservoir since 1979--and updated in 2004--due to high levels of mercury found in fish," said Hudson. "Recreational activities such as boating, swimming and catch-and-release fishing don't pose any health concerns."

(more)

Tailings, or the rocks and gravel left over after the ore was processed from the mine site, may have been hauled away and used for construction purposes. “These tailings contain high levels of arsenic and are considered a health hazard, especially for very small children,” said Hudson. “We have heard that tailings were taken from the mine site, but we aren't sure where any might have been placed. If you have information about that, please call 1-877-290-6767.” The report also recommends that people who use their domestic well for drinking and cooking get their water tested yearly for naturally occurring arsenic, as well as for nitrates and bacteria.

Anyone can review and provide comment on this report by July 25. Submit comments by email: ehap.info@state.or.us or in writing: Environmental Health Assessment Program, 800 NE Oregon St., Suite 640, Portland, OR 97232.

A public meeting will also be scheduled for later this summer in Cottage Grove.

The report can be found at

<http://public.health.oregon.gov/HealthyEnvironments/TrackingAssessment/EnvironmentalHealthAssessment/Pages/bbmsite.aspx>

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