



ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10

June 2004

Update on Northport Voluntary Soil Testing and Cleanup

This fact sheet provides an update on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) voluntary soil testing program in Northport, Washington, and it outlines the cleanup work that will begin in July. It also describes citizen concerns raised at the community open houses that were held on April 20 and 21, and explains how EPA is responding.

Voluntary Soil Testing

In May, as part of the voluntary soil testing program, EPA collected soil samples from 148 residential and common-use areas in and near Northport. Some of the properties tested are on federal or state land. EPA provided the soil testing free of charge.

Preliminary field testing indicates that soil at just over half of the properties contains concentrations of lead and arsenic that are higher than the State of Washington Department of Ecology cleanup levels. EPA will receive confirmatory laboratory results in mid to late June. The laboratory results will be used to determine which properties are in need of additional action.

Summer Cleanup Plans

In early July, EPA will begin the cleanup at the Le Roi Smelter site. With the consent of property owners, cleanup will begin at residential and commercial properties where needed. EPA expects the entire cleanup to take 9 to 12 weeks. Work will be done during the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

Twenty-five to 30 EPA and contractor employees will be in town this summer working on the cleanup. Ten to 15 of the employees involved will be local residents, who have been hired to assist with the cleanup. They will be working as flaggers, security guards, technicians, and truck drivers. EPA plans to rent local office space and purchase supplies locally.

While the cleanup is taking place, you will see construction equipment such as dump trucks, excavators, graders, and water trucks working in town, mostly at the smelter site. Similar

equipment will be used to clean up residential properties. EPA's contractor, Environmental Quality Management, Inc., will make every effort to be a good neighbor while the project is under way.

Controlling Dust

EPA and its contractors will control dust where cleanup activities are taking place. They will apply water and/or spray-on adhesives to surfaces, and stabilize roads and cleared areas with mulch and gravel. Dump trucks will be covered with tarps to prevent contaminated soil from spreading in the community during cleanup of residential properties. All staff working on the project will be trained in dust control. Air quality will be monitored daily during the cleanup to make sure that dust controls are working effectively.

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Community Concerns

EPA would like to thank the many citizens who attended the community open houses in April. Many concerns were brought to EPA's attention, and we appreciate people sharing their thoughts. Following are some of the issues raised at the open house, and since then, when EPA staff were in town testing soil.

Demolition of the Smelter Smokestack

Many people asked EPA to preserve the Le Roi Smelter smokestack because of its historical significance and importance as a community landmark. In looking into options on this issue, EPA learned that the smokestack is located on property owned by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad.

EPA has discussed BNSF's plans for the smokestack with representatives of the railroad. BNSF representatives said that the railroad is aware of community concerns, but that the current condition of the smokestack could present a hazard to the future of safe rail operations. BNSF believes the stack must be either moved or taken down to ensure the safety of the community and BNSF operating personnel. Contact information for BNSF is provided at the end of this factsheet.

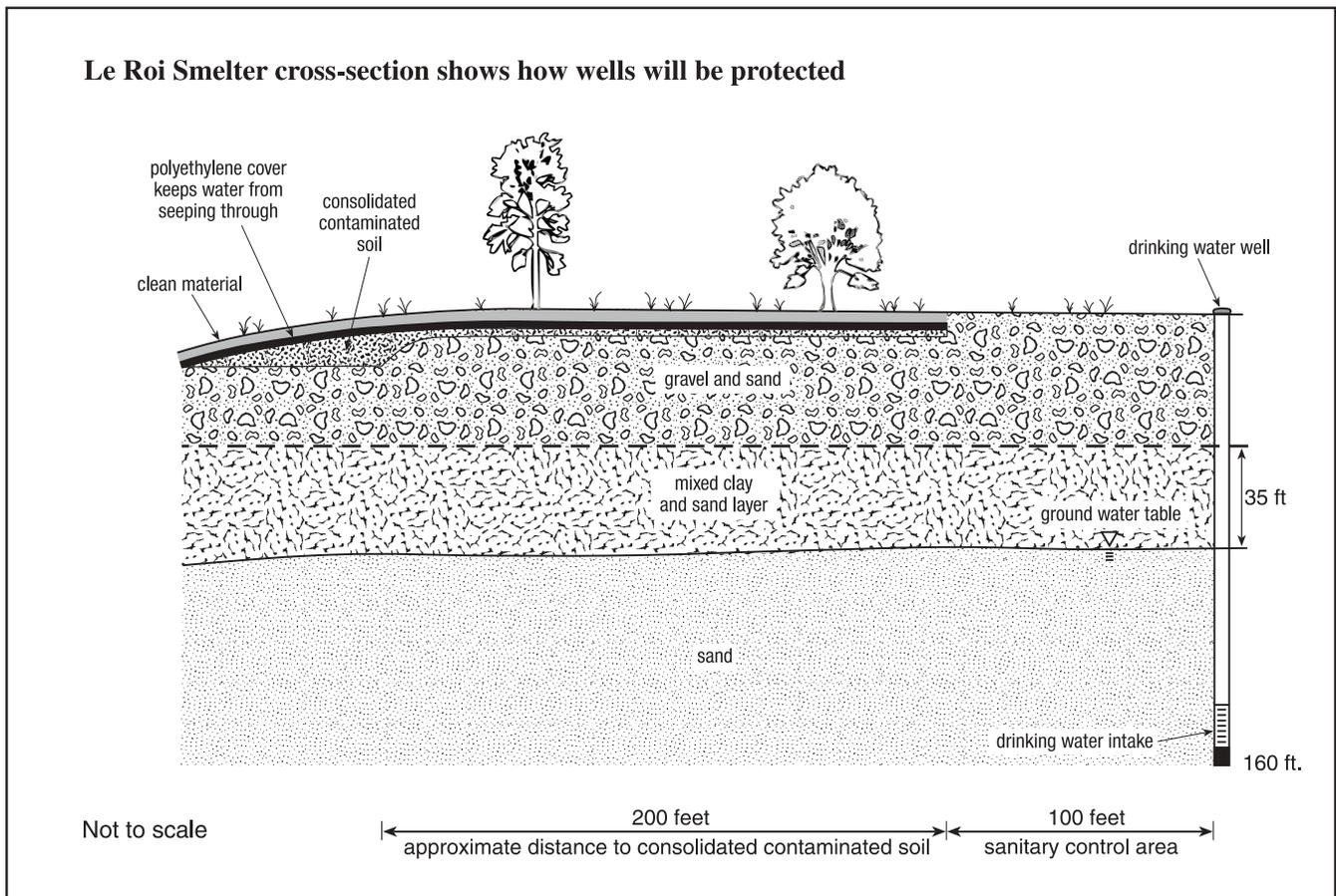
Protecting Northport Drinking Water Wells

Many people are concerned about EPA's plan to consolidate contaminated soil at the Le Roi Smelter property. People are worried that the waste could seep into three drinking water wells and contaminate the water that Northport residents drink.

The safety of the Northport wells and the wellhead protection area is of the utmost importance to EPA. We will take every precaution to ensure the safety of the drinking water wells.

EPA has looked at ways contamination might get into the wells. Our analysis shows that contamination will not move into the wells, and the wellhead protection area will remain protected and safe for several reasons.

First, the wells collect water from more than 100 feet below the ground surface. A dense, 35-foot layer of clay and sand prevents contamination from moving from the surface down to where the drinking water is collected. This dense layer acts as a barrier, and it will continue to prevent the contaminants from moving into the drinking water zone. Contamination has existed at the smelter site for more than 80 years and testing during the past 35 years shows no evidence of contamination in the wells.



It is also important to note that metals do not move through soil easily, and so keeping metals out of the wells is easier than for other contaminants.

Second, EPA will maintain a minimum 100-foot buffer zone around each well. This is consistent with the sanitary control area established by the City of Northport, in full compliance with the requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act and other applicable state and federal laws. All contaminated soil will be placed outside the 100-foot sanitary control area. Any work conducted within the area will be done solely by hand, not with heavy equipment.

Third, in response to citizen concerns, EPA will install a polyethylene cover over the consolidated waste. The cover will prevent rain from washing contamination into the soil beneath it. The cover will provide an even greater level of protection at the site.

As a result of these safety measures, Northport and its drinking water wells will have far greater protection from mine-waste contamination when the cleanup is done than they do now. The cleanup will leave Northport and its wells safe from contamination.

Placement of Residential and Common-Use Area Soils

Some residents have asked EPA to haul contaminated residential and common-use area soils away from Northport to an alternate location. They have expressed concern that these soils will increase the amount of contamination at the smelter property.

Following the April open houses, EPA carefully re-evaluated its soil placement plan. We concluded that moving soil from residential and common-use areas to the smelter will not increase risks to the wells or the wellhead protection area. The reason for this is that a relatively small quantity of soil will be moved to the smelter property, compared with what already exists there. Further, the residential and common-use area soils have 10 to 100 times less contamination than the soils already at the smelter.

The residential and common-use area soils will be fenced, placed under the protective polyethylene cover and located at appropriate distances from the wells as described above. The addition of these soils to the smelter property will not affect overall soil or groundwater quality.

Another reason that it makes sense to place residential and common-use area soils at the smelter is that hauling the soils outside of Northport is estimated to cost more than \$250,000. By moving the soils to the smelter, EPA is able to save taxpayer dollars and still provide the same level of protection to human health and the environment. EPA is planning to cover the consolidated soils with a polyethylene cover, as noted above, which will provide added protection.

Testing of Properties Not Sampled in May

EPA has not yet completed testing all properties enrolled in the voluntary soil testing program. The property owners have asked whether these enrolled properties will still be tested. EPA does plan to test the properties in mid to late July. If the properties are eligible for cleanup, EPA will clean up the properties this summer, with consent of the property owners.

Visit the EPA Website

www.epa.gov/r10earth/



click on *index A-Z*

click on *L*

click on *Le Roi Smelter*

For More Information

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