
Environmental Fact Sheet



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10

January 2003

EPA Revises Wastewater Permits for Silver Valley Mines Drafts Available for Public Review and Comment

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) invites you to comment on revised draft wastewater permits for three mining facilities in northern Idaho:

- **Lucky Friday Mine** (Osburn, Idaho)
- **Coeur and Galena Mines and Mills** (Wallace, Idaho)

These permits are required under the Clean Water Act for all point sources that discharge pollutants into waters of the United States. These permits will update the facilities' expired permits.

The permits set limits on the amount of metals the facilities can discharge into the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River. The primary changes from the previous draft permits are the discharge limits for cadmium, lead and zinc.

You Can Comment on the Revised Draft Permits

We would like to hear from you. EPA will consider all comments before issuing the final permits. All comments that were submitted during the earlier comment period in 2001 will continue to be a part of the record for these permits. Therefore, EPA suggests that commenters now focus on the changes between the 2001 draft permits and the revised draft permits. The primary changes are the discharge limits; all changes are highlighted in the revised draft permits. **Written comments should be sent to EPA by February 25, 2003.** Comments should be addressed to: Office of Water Director at U.S. EPA, Region 10, 1200 Sixth Avenue, OW-130, Seattle, WA 98101.



Public Hearing Scheduled

We have scheduled a public hearing on **February 6, 2003**, beginning at **6:00 p.m.** at **Silver Hills Middle School** in Osburn, Idaho. A sign-in process will be used for people who want to make a statement or give EPA their written comments at the hearing.

After the public comment period, EPA will prepare a response to public comments, make appropriate changes, and submit the proposed final permits to the state for its final certification. EPA will respond to all comments received during the 2001 comment period and the current comment period.

Two Sets of Limits Proposed

For cadmium, lead and zinc, the permits propose two sets of limits: One set is based on the State of Idaho's recently adopted site-specific criteria for the South Fork; the other set is based on the State's current Clean Water Act water quality criteria. The limits based on the site-specific criteria allow the mines to discharge more lead and zinc than the limits based on Idaho's current Clean Water Act criteria. If EPA approves the site-specific criteria, the limits in final permits will be based on these criteria.

Why Were the Permits Revised?

EPA first released draft permits for these facilities in 2001. At that time, the proposed limits were based on a special set of water quality requirements, known as the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), for the Coeur d'Alene Basin. However, the TMDL was later declared null and void by a state court. EPA revised the permit limits so they are no longer based on the TMDL. The revised draft permit limits also incorporate comments received on the 2001 draft permits and new data collected since 2001.

What Are Site-Specific Criteria?

The State of Idaho developed water quality criteria for cadmium, lead and zinc for the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River to better reflect local environmental conditions. The site-specific criteria are intended to come closer than the national criteria in providing protection of aquatic life in the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River by taking into account local biological and chemical conditions.

EPA is currently reviewing the site-specific criteria. If EPA approves the site-specific criteria before the permits are reissued, then the discharge limits in the permits will be based on the site-specific criteria. If EPA does not approve the site-specific criteria, the discharge limits would be based on the State's current water

quality criteria. EPA expects to make a decision regarding the site-specific criteria before finalizing the permits.

Other Permit Requirements

- As in the 2001 draft permits, the revised draft permits allow the mines to vary the amounts of copper, mercury and silver discharged based on river flow conditions.
- As in the 2001 draft permits, the revised draft permits allow for a 25 percent by volume "mixing zone" for copper, mercury and silver. This allows larger amounts of wastewater and higher concentrations of pollutants to be discharged than would otherwise be allowed without a mixing zone or with a smaller mixing zone.
- The revised draft permits give the mines three years to comply with the permit limits that they cannot currently meet. A three year compliance schedule is consistent with Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's comments on the revised draft permits.
- The permits require that the mines monitor the streams they are discharging the wastewater into. The monitoring requirements also include quarterly testing to evaluate possible combined toxic effects on aquatic organisms. The mines will also be required to conduct studies of their treatment ponds to determine if the wastewater is seeping from the ponds to the nearby streams. These monitoring requirements are the same as in the 2001 draft permit.
- The permits will each be issued for a five-year period.

Hecla requested a variance from water quality standards for lead and zinc until the site-specific criteria is developed. If EPA does not approve the site-specific criteria, then EPA will continue to process the variance request. If a variance is granted after the permit is issued, the permit can be modified to include the variance.

You Can Also Comment State Certification Decisions

As part of the EPA's wastewater permit process, the state must certify the permit before it is issued. You can give your input on IDEQ's certification process by contacting the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Coeur d'Alene Regional Office, c/o David Stasney, 2110 Ironwood Parkway, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814. Public comments must be submitted by February 25, 2003.

Who Can You Call?

For information about the Lucky Friday draft permit, contact Patty McGrath, at 206-553-0979.

For information about the Coeur and Galena draft permit, contact Kelly Huynh, at 206-553-8414, or in her absence, Patty McGrath at 206-553-0979.

For information about the site-specific criteria, contact Lisa Macchio, at 206-553-1834

You can also use EPA's toll-free number: 1-800-424-4372.

Where to Review the Permits

The revised draft NPDES permits and fact sheets can be reviewed at the following locations:

EPA Field Office
1910 NW Boulevard
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho 83814
(208) 664-4588

Idaho Department of Environmental Quality
Coeur d'Alene Regional Office
2110 Ironwood Parkway
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, 83814
(208) 769-1422

Wallace Public Library
415 River Street
Wallace, Idaho
(208) 752-4571

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,
Region 10
1200 Sixth Avenue, OW-130
Seattle, Washington 98101
(206) 553-0523 or 1-800-424-4372

The revised draft permits and fact sheets can also be found on EPA's Region 10 website at: www.epa.gov/r10earth/water.htm.

The fact sheets describe in detail the differences between the 2001 draft permits and the revised draft permits and how the metals limits were developed for the revised draft permits.



United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 10, ECO-081
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98101

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SILVER VALLEY MINES

January, 2003

***EPA REVISES WASTERWATER PERMITS
PUBLIC COMMENT INVITED***