



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 10
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101

**Open Letter from the Environmental Protection Agency
Concerning the Closure of the Astaris Facility**

October 25, 2001

Dear Concerned Citizens of Greater Pocatello and Fort Hall:

EPA staff who have worked on the many environmental issues related to the Astaris facility over the past several years were notified on October 11th – at the same time as plant employees – of the plan to close down operations by the end of this year. We realize that the closure is having a serious effect on many lives, and our thoughts are with those families affected by the layoffs.

Many residents in your area have expressed concern about what this announcement means for the cleanup of environmental contamination at the facility. We want to reassure you that the plant closure will not reduce EPA's commitment, or company obligations, to making this site permanently safe for the public and the environment.

Astaris and the prior owner, FMC, still remain legally responsible for ongoing environmental cleanup work, and have been cooperative in working with EPA to meet cleanup requirements. In addition to previously initiated cleanup work, the companies are obligated to complete closure of hazardous waste ponds, to install and maintain protective caps on these ponds, and to monitor the groundwater near those ponds. In addition, the companies have been required to establish letters of credit, thus ensuring that funds are available to EPA to get that work done if the companies do not follow through on their obligations.

EPA will retain a strong role for as long as the cleanup process takes, and we will use our authorities under our two major hazardous waste laws – Superfund, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) – to ensure a result that protects human health and the environment. Following is a summary of a few recent activities and developments at the site.

- Work on the Superfund cleanup process for the site will not be significantly affected by the decision to close the facility, and the RCRA process will now shift its focus from issuing a permit for an operating waste treatment facility to developing what is referred to as a Post-closure Permit, which includes provisions for long term monitoring of the capped wastes. Both the Superfund and RCRA processes will focus on cleaning up contamination and protecting groundwater.
- Because the phosphorus production plant will no longer be operating and producing waste, further construction of the LDR waste treatment system has been halted by the company. This system was being built on site to treat hazardous production wastes at the plant. As a result of the announced

closure of the production plant, EPA cancelled a public meeting which had been scheduled for October 23 to discuss the LDR waste treatment facility.

- The 30-day public comment period on the RCRA Closure and Post-closure Plans for Ponds 17 & 18 which began on October 4th has been extended for two weeks to November 16, 2001. These plans provide detailed technical information about how the waste contained in the ponds will be capped safely and how monitoring will be done to protect groundwater in the area from contamination. Many other ponds at the facility have already been capped in this manner, which EPA considers to be a safe and effective solution for managing these wastes. This comment period follows a decision by EPA on a proposal announced for public comment in August 2001 to allow the companies to cap Pond 18 instead of removing the waste and treating it in the LDR Treatment System.

EPA will continue to work with FMC and Astaris, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, state and local agencies, and the public to ensure that this site is closed in an environmentally responsible way. Over the coming months, we will continue to provide updates and information, and there will be many opportunities for the public to provide input to EPA about its work at the facility. We truly welcome and appreciate your participation.

L. John Iani
Regional Administrator
EPA Region 10

EPA periodically sends out information about the work we are doing in the Pocatello and Fort Hall areas. If you would like to be added to our mailing list to keep up to date on EPA actions, comment periods, public meetings, etc., please contact Charles Bert, EPA Community Involvement Coordinator, at (206) 553-0225, or e-mail at bert.charles@epa.gov.