



Bureau of Indian Affairs Tar Creek Superfund Site



Tar Creek Superfund Site is located in northeast Oklahoma in Ottawa County and encompasses approximately 104 km² or 25,699 acres

Site Background

Tar Creek Superfund Site, located in northeastern Oklahoma, is part of the Tri-State Mining District (OK, KS, and MO), which has some of the richest deposits of lead and zinc ore in the United States. Most of the rich deposits of ore are gone and active large-scale mining no longer occurs, which spanned from the late 1800s and 1970. Tar Creek Superfund Site remains one of the most challenging cleanup projects in the U.S. and on the National Priorities List (NPL) due to the massive areal extent of disturbance and contamination; volumes of contaminated waters, sediments, waste materials, and soil; proximity to several communities; and inclusion of sovereign Native American lands. In 1984, 40 square miles of the Site were placed on the NPL. The Department of the Interior's (Department) Central Hazardous Materials Fund (CHF) began funding the Site in 1995 with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) taking the technical lead for the cleanup.

The BIA supports remedial efforts of several Operable Units (OU) at Tar Creek. OU 1 considered ground and surface water contamination. OU 2 looked at contamination at residential properties, including elevated blood lead levels. OU 4 addresses the leftover mine tailings, or chat piles, which are fenced in to prevent illegal removal and unauthorized access to the Site. OU 4 also addresses mine and mill waste, smelter waste and floatation ponds. OU 5 considers sediment and surface water. In 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) was an additional effort co-chaired by representatives from each agency.

The CHF continues to support the Site's ongoing MOU activities and contaminant migration prevention activities. These activities are predominantly related to managing and supporting activities related to Indian allotted and trust properties regarding OU 4 and OU 5. Discussions amongst the Site's involved agencies are currently underway, which are primarily focused on establishing a long-term land use program to include Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping of land use decisions.

The BIA's Eastern Oklahoma Region continues to support the remedial cleanup efforts of the EPA, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) and the state of Oklahoma at Tar Creek Superfund Site.

- ### Accomplishments
- ◇ In 2006, BIA completed a sales agreement for the St. Joe chat pile. The piles are moved to a "washing" location for screening before use.
 - ◇ Severe fence damage occurred due to vandalism and an EF-5 tornado (highest risk score based on Enhanced F scale). Three miles of the fence have since been repaired and/or replaced as of 2012.
 - ◇ To date, approx. 3,747,434 tons of chat have been removed from the site.

The EPA is the lead regulatory authority at Tar Creek. For more information about their involvement and cleanup status updates, please visit: <http://www.epa.gov/region6/6sf/oklahoma/>

The Department's Central Hazardous Materials Fund

The CHF is the Department's principal source of funds for the cleanup of the most highly contaminated sites located within national parks, national wildlife refuges, and other Department-managed lands.

For more information on the CHF, please visit: <http://www.doi.gov/pmb/oepe/eclm/>



Tar Creek Chat Pile before and after excavation (use vehicles for scale)