



EPA's Proposed Cleanup: Understanding the Plan

You may have questions or concerns about EPA's Proposed Cleanup Plan for the Upper Coeur d'Alene Basin. Here, EPA gives you the facts on a select topic.

Topic Number 6:

Water Treatment: A Smart Way to Address Serious Contamination

Both surface water and groundwater in the Upper Basin are severely contaminated. Levels of metals are so high in certain areas that some stream life cannot survive. In some places, zinc levels are over 50 times higher than Idaho's standards allow. It's a serious problem that EPA has a responsibility to address. Water treatment is a major part of the proposed cleanup plan. That's because it would help reduce contamination in creeks and rivers in a very efficient way.

In many areas of the Upper Basin, mining waste lies under communities, and beneath highways and other infrastructure. Removing these underground contamination sources is not realistic in many cases. Water moving under ground that comes into contact with the waste often becomes contaminated. The practical option is to collect and treat the contaminated water before it enters streams and rivers. The proposed plan calls for water treatment in the Bunker Hill

Box, Woodland Park, and along portions of the South Fork Coeur d'Alene River.

Water treatment provides the biggest reduction in water contamination per dollar spent than any other single action in the proposed plan. For example, the proposed water treatment actions in the Box would provide up to 40% of the cleanup gains for only 4% of the total cleanup cost. The plan calls for treating collected water at the Central Treatment Plant (CTP) in Kellogg -- an existing facility that treats water from the Bunker Hill Mine. The plant's capacity would be increased to handle the extra water, but the plant's overall footprint would not change. Treated water would go back into the South Fork. This approach eliminates the need for a new, large-scale plant -- saving money in design and construction fees and lowering operational costs. Treating individual sources would be much more expensive and less efficient.

Contrary to some claims, groundwater collection and treatment will not "dry up" the creeks and rivers. EPA knows that healthy stream and river flows must be preserved for recreation, mining activities, fish habitat and other uses. EPA expects water collection would remove less than 10% of the stream flow during "low flow" conditions and less than 4% of the stream flow during average conditions. Also, water collection could be stopped during very dry spells to avoid possible impacts to fish and other stream life.

We want to hear from you. Your ideas and comments are important to help design and guide the cleanup. Send comments by November 23 to cdabasin@epa.gov or to Coeur d'Alene Basin Team, EPA, 1200 6th Avenue, Suite 900, ECL-113, Seattle, WA 98101.

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