

Ecology Plans Emergency Action to Prevent Breaching at Tailings Pile



Location of recent major erosion in 2012

The Washington Department of Ecology is beginning work the week of October 22, 2012 to prevent possible breaching of the Upper Tailings Pile of the Van Stone Mine site. The site is located 24 miles northeast of the city of Colville off Van Stone Road in Stevens County, Washington (Fig.1).

Rain events this spring and summer made the Upper Tailings Pile vulnerable to breaching. Water accumulated on the tailings pile and washed tailings into a tributary to Onion Creek and a limited portion of the surrounding area. While the water has cleared up since that time, the tailings pile remains unstable.

The Work Plan

Ecology developed a Work Plan to address impacts from the major erosion that occurred at the Upper Tailings Pile. The Work Plan outlines details about how the work will be conducted. This work is an emergency action necessary to protect people and the environment in the area.

The primary focus of the work is to reduce or eliminate future releases from the Upper Tailings Pile due to erosion. A drainage-way through the failed Upper Tailings Pile will be constructed to control water flow.

The ditch that lies between the two parts of the tailings pile will be re-graded and the channel will be armored with stone. The work is intended to reduce the volume of water flowing through the area and re-establish the intended drainage pattern. The side slopes of the breach area will be cut back and a new berm created. Please see the Work Plan for details about the work and design.

Because of the urgent need to begin work, there is no formal public comment period. However, the Work Plan is available for review at the locations listed on page 3. Questions may be directed to Ecology's Site Manager, Brendan Dowling. See the box at the right for contact details.

Take Precautions If You Are Near the Site

The Tailings Piles near the Van Stone Mine Site are not stable areas for recreating. **For your safety, please stay away from the Upper and Lower Tailings Piles.**

The following recommendations are for your safety:

- Do not go on or near the tailings piles or the mill site.
- Avoid hiking, bicycling, ATV use, horseback riding, or other recreational activities in this area.
- Take measures to keep the dust minimized inside your home and outside on your property if you live near the site.

Health Related Questions

Matt Schanz at the Northeast Tri-County Health District in Colville at 509/684-2262

Site Related Questions

Brendan Dowling
WA Department of Ecology
4601 N. Monroe, Spokane WA
99205 Phone 509/329-3611 or
Brendan.dowling@ecy.wa.gov

For **ADA accommodations** or documents in an alternate format, call Carol Bergin 509/329-3546 (voice), 711 (relay service), or 877-833-6341 (TTY).

Facility Site ID No. 1554858

Cleanup Site ID No. 461

Brief Site Background

Lead and zinc mining explorations began as early as 1926 at the site and stopped in 1993. Past sampling showed soil contains arsenic, cadmium, copper, lead, mercury, and zinc at levels that exceed state standards. Groundwater also exceeds state standards for arsenic, cadmium, and lead.

Several companies were affiliated with mining activities at the site over the years. As a result of their ownership, operations, and contribution of contaminants at the site, they are responsible for cleanup and are known as potentially liable persons (PLPs). The PLPs for this site are American Smelting and Refining Company (Asarco), Callahan Mining Corp., Sundown Holdings, Ltd., Equinox Resources (Wash.) Inc., and Vaagen Brothers as a current property owner of the Upper Tailings Pile.

The site is made up of four areas:

- The location of the former milling facility (now dismantled) and offices.
- Waste rock piles and the mine workings area, including what are now pit lakes.
- The Upper Tailings Pile.
- The Lower Tailings Pile.

Asarco filed for bankruptcy in 2005. Ecology filed a claim against Asarco for cleanup of environmental damages in Washington State. A settlement was reached and Ecology received \$3.5 million toward cleanup of the Van Stone Mine site. Work conducted at the site related to the Work Plan and Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study is coming from this Asarco settlement.

During Asarco's operations at the site, the milling complex and mine infrastructure was built. Close to three million tons of ore was produced by Asarco and Equinox. Fine-grained material called tailings were produced during ore processing and metal extraction.

The tailings were moved downhill as slurry from the milling facility and stored in an area nearly 10

acres in size that was called the Upper Tailings Pile. The tailings pile is near a tributary of Onion Creek that flows past the Onion Creek School. In 1961 the dam holding the tailings in place failed and flooded a tributary of Onion Creek. The tailings traveled downstream as far as the Onion Creek School damaging property and structures.

As a result of the failure of the Upper Tailings Pile, a Lower Tailings Pile was constructed and used until 1993. This pile is nearly 40 acres. This pile is near another tributary of Onion Creek.

The Department of Natural Resources required limited reclamation activities at the site. Completed activities include taking the mill apart, removing the tailings pond and disposing of lines used for slurried tailings.

A Remedial Investigation is being conducted at the site to provide information about the extent of contamination. A Feasibility Study is also underway and will evaluate cleanup options.

What Happens Next?

Ecology will complete the work outlined in the Work Plan while the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study continue. Ecology will make the RI/FS reports available for public comment in early 2013.

Contact Information

Site Related Questions

Brendan Dowling, Site Manager
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Toxics Cleanup Program
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509/329-3611 or e-mail
Brendan.dowling@ecy.wa.gov

Public Involvement Questions

Carol Bergin
See Ecology Address Above
509/329-3546 or Carol.bergin@ecy.wa.gov

Document Review Locations

WA Department of Ecology

4601 N. Monroe
Spokane, WA 992051295
Call Kari Johnson for an
Appointment 509/329-3415

Onion Creek School District

2006 Lotze Creek Road
Colville, WA 99114-8602
Phone: 509/732-4240

Onion Creek General Store/Library

2191 Onion Creek Road
Colville, WA 99114
Phone: 509/732-6648

Ecology's Toxics Cleanup Website

<https://fortress.wa.gov/ecy/gsp/Sitepage.aspx?csid=461>

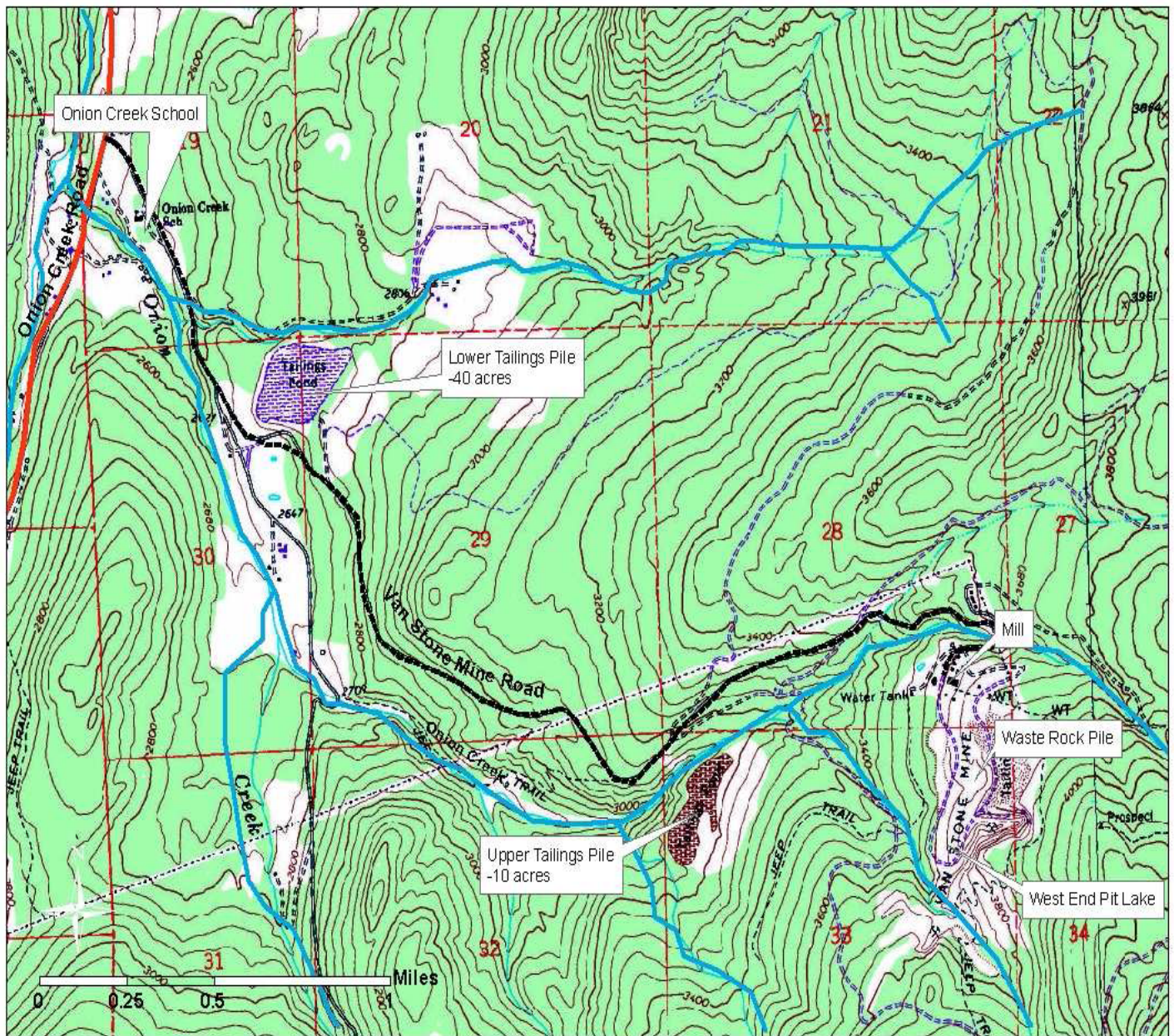


Figure 1