
Environmental Fact Sheet



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 10

May 2001

Upper Columbia River Sampling Northeast Washington

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is conducting an assessment of hazardous substance contamination in the upper Columbia River. This fact sheet describes the field work that will take place this year.

Sampling To Begin This Month

In May, EPA will begin sediment sampling along the upper Columbia River. During this assessment sediment samples will be taken from the northern reaches of the Upper Columbia River beginning near Inchelium, WA northward along the River and a number of its tributaries. Samples will also be taken from locations north of the Canadian border. Sampling will help EPA determine if this site should be on EPA's National Priorities List (NPL) for potential cleanup. Sampling will also provide useful information on contamination in the upper Columbia River and potential contaminant sources.

Sediment samples collected from the upper Columbia River will be analyzed for metals, pesticides and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Sediment samples collected from the tributaries will be analyzed for metals, pesticides and PCBs as determined necessary. EPA will also visit a number of active and inactive mines and mills in the area, collecting samples as needed. The results of this sampling and analysis should be available by early next year.

How the Site Assessment Process Was Started

In August of 1999, The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Indian Reservation petitioned EPA to conduct an assessment of the upper Columbia River. The federal Superfund Law, also known as CERCLA, allows the public and other agencies to request an EPA assessment when contamination is suspected. The EPA, the Colville Confederated Tribes and the Spokane Tribe share concern about the potential impact of contamination on human health and the environment. The Tribes have authority under applicable Federal and Tribal law to protect the quality of lands, water and other critical tribal resources that comprise the "Reservation Environment." The EPA also has a trust responsibility to Tribes that arises from Indian treaties,

statutes, executive orders, and historical relations between the United States and Indian tribes.

What is an EPA Assessment?

The EPA uses a site assessment process to determine which sites qualify for the National Priorities List (NPL). The NPL is the list of the nation's priorities for full scale environmental investigation and possible cleanup. Samples are collected to determine whether hazardous substances are present at the site and whether additional investigation is necessary.

Typically, an assessment includes a Preliminary Assessment (PA) and a Site Investigation (SI). The PA activities include review of existing file information and a site visit. In December of 2000, EPA completed a PA for the upper Columbia River. Based on this preliminary assessment, EPA concluded that a site investigation of the upper Columbia River was warranted. Site investigation activities include the review of all available data, development of field work plans, and field sampling.

Coordinating With Others Is Important

This project is one of the largest site assessments ever done by the Region 10 EPA staff in Seattle. Site assessment field activities involve sampling at locations over a broad geographical area, including numerous mine and mill sites along the upper Columbia River.

Working cooperatively is important to the successful assessment of such a large site. To tackle the project, EPA is coordinating with the Colville Confederated Tribes and Spokane Tribe of Indians, Washington Department of Ecology, Environment Canada, British Columbia Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks, and other federal and local agencies.

How You Can Get Involved:

If you have questions or would like more information, please fill out and return the attached form. You can also contact any of the following people in Seattle:

Monica Tonel, Site Assessment Manager
Phone: 206 553-0323
email: tonel.monica@epa.gov

Mark Ader, Site Assessment Manager
Phone: 206 553-1808
email: ader.mark@epa.gov

Judy Smith, Community Involvement Coordinator
Phone: 206 553-6246
e-mail: smith.judy@epa.gov

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting the people listed above.

Upper Columbia River Sampling:
*Sampling activities will occur from
Inchelium, WA to north of the
U.S. - Canadian border*

