

F A C T S H E E T

Monticello Remedial Action Project Vicinity Property Cleanup Process



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This fact sheet provides a brief description of the process used to clean up homes and businesses in Monticello that are contaminated with uranium mill tailings. These homes and businesses are called "vicinity properties." The cleanup is part of the Monticello, Utah, Superfund projects being performed by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Grand Junction Office in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the State of Utah.

Background

The Monticello Vicinity Properties Project (MVPP) involves removing uranium mill tailings from more than 400 residential and business properties in the Monticello area.

Tailings and Radon

Tailings are the sand-like material that remains after uranium has been extracted from the ore. Throughout the operating period of the Monticello mill, mill tailings were used as fill material for construction purposes. Vicinity properties also were contaminated by windblown tailings from the millsite.

Tailings contain naturally occurring materials that decay to radium and produce radon, a radioactive gas. If radon gas is inhaled over a long period of time, particularly in enclosed areas, it can cause damage to lung tissue and can increase the risk of lung cancer. The purpose of the cleanup project is to minimize the risks to the public and environment from exposure to the mill tailings and the radon gas they produce.

Cleanup Remedy

The cleanup remedy selected for the MVPP by DOE, EPA, and the State of Utah is to remove the tailings and contaminated materials from grounds and structures and replace them with clean materials. This selection was documented in the 1989 Record of Decision, a document that explains the reasons for selecting a particular cleanup remedy. The contaminated materials from the vicinity properties are being temporarily moved to the Monticello millsite and will be disposed of with the millsite tailings in a permanent disposal cell.

Owner Participation

In 1986, EPA placed all the vicinity properties in Monticello on its National Priorities List (NPL). The NPL is EPA's list of top-priority sites that are eligible for cleanup under the Federal Superfund program. Because of its status as an NPL site, all cleanup activities must satisfy the requirements of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Property-owner participation, therefore, is required.

Owner-Access Agreement

Participation involves signing an owner-access agreement to allow surveys, samples, and studies of the property. Interior surveys of structures may be done if there are indications that tailings may exist within or beneath those structures.

If survey and sample results indicate the presence of contamination above EPA-established standards, DOE includes the property in the cleanup program.

Property Cleanup Design

After a property is included in the MVPP, a detailed survey of the physical and radiological features of the property is done to prepare the cleanup design. The design process normally takes between 6 and 12 months. Property owners are encouraged to comment on the preliminary design. When the final construction design is completed, a written Remedial Action Agreement (RAA) is prepared.

The RAA is the formal contract between the property owner and DOE to perform cleanup at the property. It outlines the responsibilities of DOE and the property owner and indicates the owner's acceptance of all aspects of the construction phase (e.g., methods,

materials, schedule, and potential dislocation). The agreement is signed by the property owner, DOE, and renter, if the property is being rented. The property owner keeps a copy of the RAA with original signatures and design drawing(s).

Performing the Cleanup

Once the RAA is signed, bids from construction firms are solicited for the work. After the bid is awarded, the construction subcontractor, along with the property owner and the construction inspector, conduct a “walk-through” of the property to document its preconstruction condition.

Construction activity involves the physical removal of contaminated materials from the property. The amount of work and time required to complete the cleanup depends upon the extent and location of the tailings deposits. Inspectors carefully monitor the work to ensure that all activities are being performed in a safe, proper, and timely manner. Property owners are encouraged to discuss with DOE, the construction inspector, or the owner relations representative any concerns they may have about cleanup activities.

Following tailings removal and reconstruction, the property owner, construction inspector, and the construction subcontractor inspect the final condition of the property. The owner is asked to show approval of the work by signing a Notice of Final Inspection. A 12-month warranty period follows final construction, during which time the owner may recognize and declare any defects in the cleanup construction. The owner may contact DOE or the owner relations representative to arrange an inspection so the problem can be resolved as quickly as possible.

Verifying and Certifying Completion

Once the construction phase of the cleanup is finished, technicians may install devices that measure radon concentrations in the structures on the property. In most cases, these devices are installed and left in place for 1 year. This follow-up monitoring is done to ensure that the cleanup has successfully reduced radon concentrations. After cleanup and verification are completed, DOE prepares a completion report for each property certifying that the property is in compliance with the cleanup standards established by EPA.

Site Boundary Program

DOE is undertaking the final steps of the Monticello Vicinity Properties Project to ensure that all contaminated materials generated as a result of activities at the Monticello millsite are identified and safely disposed. DOE is currently investigating whether some contaminated building equipment and materials may have left the site during the period of millsite operation. See the Fact Sheet on Monticello Vicinity Properties Project Site Boundary Program for more information on DOE’s efforts to identify all properties containing contaminated Monticello millsite materials within an 8-mile radius of the millsite and any other locations where contaminated materials may have been taken.
