



EPA adds Upper Columbia River site to the Superfund National Priorities List to protect public health from metals contamination

SEATTLE (December 13, 2024) -- Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency added the Upper Columbia River Site in northeast Washington to the Superfund National Priorities List, the list of sites throughout the United States and its territories where historic releases of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants pose significant threats to human health and the environment.

EPA has determined that soils within the site are contaminated with lead and arsenic and pose an unacceptable risk to residents at affected properties, particularly to children and women of childbearing age. Additionally, sediments in the river are contaminated with metals, including zinc, copper, cadmium, selenium, lead and mercury, that pose a risk to fish, wildlife, birds, and other organisms that live in and along the river.

The primary source of contamination at the site is the Teck Metals Ltd. smelting facility in Trail, British Columbia, approximately 10 river miles upstream of the international boundary. The former Le Roi smelter in Northport, Washington, also contributed contamination.

"Adding the Upper Columbia River to the EPA's National Priorities List is another example of the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to protecting public health in all communities, especially those already overburdened by pollution," **said Cliff Villa, Deputy Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Land and Emergency Management.** "Cleaning up contaminated land and rivers is a win-win-win for our environment, for public health, and for the economy. Every child deserves the opportunity to play in neighborhoods and backyards that are safe and free of harmful levels of lead contamination."

"With the Upper Columbia River Site finally on the Superfund List, EPA can now more comprehensively address long public health and environmental risks posed by over 100 years of mining-related pollution," **said Casey Sixkiller, Regional Administrator of EPA's Region 10 office**

in Seattle. “This work will continue to be critical for the people and communities who deserve cleaner and healthier places to live, work, and play.”

“EPA’s decision to list the Upper Columbia River Site on the National Priorities List will strengthen and boost our collective efforts to address a legacy of contamination at the site,” said **Washington Governor Jay Inslee.** “By unlocking additional federal resources, this move will help ensure that this part of our state is home to a thriving economy and ecosystem for generations to come.”

"The Colville Tribes is pleased to hear that the EPA has listed the Upper Columbia River as a Superfund site," said **Jarred-Michael Erickson, the Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.** “The river has been used for decades as a waste disposal site and that pollution not only damaged the physical river, but has also cost the Tribes enormously in terms of lost use and enjoyment of the river. Past leaders and staff of the Colville Tribes initiated and sustained the work of cleaning up the river, and today the Colville Tribes has been in litigation with Canadian company Teck Resources Limited for over 20 years to make them take responsibility for remediation of the river under United States environmental law and for damages to natural resources. While that litigation continues, a Superfund listing will unlock access to funds necessary for a thorough remediation of the river, and the listing reflects the high priority for cleanup that this site deserves. Everyone is better served if we clean the river now rather than pass the problem on to future generations."

“The Spokane Tribe supports EPA acting now to place the Site on the NPL,” said **Gregory Abrahamson, Chairman of the Spokane Tribal Business Council.** “The Upper Columbia River site includes areas within the Spokane Tribe's traditional homeland and current Spokane Reservation whose natural resources have been and continue to be integral to our subsistence and culture since time immemorial. Historic and ongoing releases of hazardous substances to the site threaten or directly affect the health and welfare of our members, our economic security, and the Spokane Tribe's political integrity. Assessing the nature and extent of such contamination and any associated risks it poses to tribal health and resources is as imperative today as it was in 2003, when the Spokane Tribe first supported EPA's proposed placement of the site on the NPL. Nearly 20 years later, the RI/FS process is ongoing, and we urge EPA to further investigations of downstream river areas proximate to the Spokane Reservation. We remain acutely concerned that many more generations of the Spokane people must endure uncertainty about Site conditions and risks due to the presence of hazardous substances. Listing will also allow funding for EPA to better characterize the nature and extent of risks posed by hazardous substances at the Site, particularly in the downriver reservoir areas proximate to the

Spokane Reservation, and to fund participation in the remedial process by affected state and tribal governments - including the Spokane Tribe – if Teck refuses to fund them.”

Following the March 5, 2024, proposed listing, the agency opened a 60-day public comment period which closed May 6, 2024. EPA’s response to public comments will be published with the FR notice finalizing the addition of the Upper Columbia River Site to the NPL and may be found at [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov).

Background

The NPL includes sites with the nation’s most serious uncontrolled or abandoned releases of contamination. This list serves as the basis for prioritizing EPA Superfund cleanup funding and enforcement actions. Only releases at non-federal sites included on the NPL are eligible to receive federal funding for long-term, permanent cleanup.

Before EPA adds a site to the NPL, a site must meet EPA’s requirements and be proposed for addition to the list in the Federal Register, subject to a 60-day public comment period. EPA may add the site to the NPL if it continues to meet the listing requirements after the public comment period closes and the agency has taken all public comments into consideration.

Superfund cleanups provide health and economic benefits to communities. The program is credited for significant reductions in both birth defects and blood-lead levels among children living near sites, and research has shown residential property values increase up to 24 percent within three miles of sites after cleanup.

Learn more about [Superfund and the National Priorities List](#).

For *Federal Register* notices and supporting documents for the NPL and proposed sites, please visit: [New Proposed and New Superfund National Priorities List Sites](#).

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