



Assessment & Cleanup of Properties Impacted by Mining Activities

This factsheet provides general information about addressing human health and environmental concerns for properties impacted by mining activities in Idaho (e.g., inactive and historic abandoned mines, mineral locations, mineral discoveries). It is not unusual for these sites or surrounding properties to have high levels of metals or other potentially hazardous materials remaining in waste rock or tailings piles, soil, sediment, and water. These materials can get into the human body in several ways (e.g., recreating in contaminated soil, putting hands or other objects covered with dust into the mouth, breathing in contaminated dust).

In certain circumstances, property owners may be liable for cleanup costs when there is contamination on their property, even if they are unaware of or did not cause the contamination. It is important for property owners, and prospective property owners, located in or near historic mining areas to conduct due diligence regarding the property.

Cities and counties are responsible for how development occurs in their jurisdictions and should take impacts from past mining into consideration when developing planning and zoning ordinances and/or promoting new development.

Site Assessment

A site assessment is the first step in determining if a property is contaminated and if human health and environmental concerns are present. Assessments are important when planning residential development or recreational uses for the property. The assessment can also determine the potential for erosion from historic mine waste piles and off-site migration of contaminants.

A site assessment is typically conducted by an environmental professional who will compile historic site information and identify physical and environmental hazards. During the site visit, the assessor may also map, photograph, and sample areas of concern.

The following DEQ programs may be available to assist property owners with a site assessment. If contamination is present, property owners will need to provide funding for cleanup:

- Preliminary Assessment Program for Mined Lands and Industrial Facilities
www.deq.idaho.gov/preliminary-assessments
- Brownfields in Idaho www.deq.idaho.gov/brownfields

Property owners can also hire an environmental consultant to conduct a phased Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) process that conforms to ASTM Standard Practice E 1527 (or accepted equivalent). ESAs are common during real estate transactions to identify recognized environmental conditions and potential risks.

Whether purchasing or selling a property potentially impacted by surrounding mining activity, it may be beneficial to research if prior assessments exist. ESAs or previous sample results and assessment information provides current or prospective property owners with disclosure information regarding historical practices and potential contaminants on and surrounding the property. This information can be used when selling the property since Idaho law requires disclosure of hazardous materials located on the property (Idaho Code, Title 55, Chapter 25). For more information on hiring an environmental consultant, see DEQ's *Choosing an Environmental Consultant* factsheet.

Cleanup

If contamination is found, there are several actions a property owner can take to control or reduce human health and environmental risks (e.g., preventing property access, preventing erosion and migration of contamination by capping, covering, or vegetating contaminated areas). Many property owners install signage and fencing to discourage property access and notify visitors of the potential risks. It is important to take steps to protect human health based on intended use of property and to reduce potential liability.

Property owners seeking DEQ's guidance during cleanup may be eligible to join DEQ's Voluntary Cleanup Program (VCP). The following webpage has VCP information, along with an application form and guidance: www.deq.idaho.gov/voluntary-cleanup-program

DEQ regulatory programs that may apply to cleanup of properties impacted by mining activities can be found at <https://adminrules.idaho.gov/rules/current/58/index.html>. Additional information about DEQ rules that may be applicable during cleanup are identified in the DEQ and Mining factsheet.

Health and Safety

Additional information about the hazards associated with historic and abandoned mining is available on the Historic Mining Areas: Health and Safety factsheet.

- The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs is a series of summaries about hazardous substances. Visit www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs for a complete list of ToxFAQs. Questions can also be directed to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare at 1-800-445-8647 or <https://healthandwelfare.idaho.gov/health-wellness/environmental-health>
- STAY OUT AND STAY ALIVE. Hazards associated with abandoned mines include open shafts, vertical mine openings, deadly gases, lack of oxygen, and decayed support beams and frameworks. Every year, dozens of people are injured or killed in recreational accidents on mine property. For more information visit: www.abandonedmines.gov
- If a property has safety hazards from historic mining (e.g., open tunnels, shafts), the Idaho Department of Lands may be able to assist with closures of these hazards. Visit: www.idl.idaho.gov/mining-minerals for more information.

For more information

DEQ maintains a facility mapper that shows identified mining site locations throughout the state in a web-accessible map view. The mapper allows for keyword searching and provides basic information about programs implemented at each site: www.deq.idaho.gov/facility-mapper.

For specific questions, contact the nearest DEQ regional office:

- Boise: (208) 373-0550
- Coeur d'Alene: (208) 769-1422
- Idaho Falls: (208) 528-2650
- State Office: (208) 373-0502
- Lewiston: (208) 799-4370
- Pocatello: (208) 236-6160
- Twin Falls: (208) 736-2190

For property within the Bunker Hill Superfund Site, contact the Panhandle Health District <https://panhandlehealthdistrict.org/institutional-controls-program> or (208) 783-0707.