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## Focus back on Tar Creek

Multiple agencies tour Superfund site

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PICHER, Okla. — From the top of a chat pile in Picher, the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund program director got a different perspective Tuesday on the scope of the Tar Creek site.

Ed Keheley, a Picher-area resident, talks on camera Tuesday during an interview with ABC "Nightline" correspondent John Donan (center) and cameraman Jerry Gonzalez on the banks of Tar Creek near Picher, Okla.

"All the pictures that come across my desk in Washington don't even begin to do it justice," Jo Ann Griffith told federal, state and local officials after a tour of the area. "I've never seen anything like this.

"I thought I'd go to the top of a chat pile and see the Tar Creek Superfund Site, but it just seems to stretch on forever, one chat pile after another. This is going to be the biggest job I've ever imagined."

The "job" — eliminating lead and heavy metal contamination from the local environment in the former lead and zinc mining field — already has spanned 19 years and cost nearly \$50 million, with minimal success.

Brian C. Griffin, Oklahoma secretary of the environment, told the group that the state and federal agencies involved "have to look for a holistic answer that will address all the problems in the soil, water and air" to make any impact on the area.

The tour was arranged by Griffin, who was the chairman of Gov. Frank Keating's Tar Creek Task Force. On hand were representatives of the White House Council on the Environment, the EPA, the

Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Forest and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Geological Survey.

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Also present were representatives of the Quapaw, Miami, Wyandotte, Shawnee, Ottawa, Peoria, Seneca-Cayuga and Modoc tribes; the mayors of Cardin, Commerce and Picher; Ottawa County Commissioner John Clark; and field representatives of the state's congressional delegation.

The tour group included a technical team of scientists, academicians and agency representatives who are studying the lead contamination problem.

"This technical team will pull together the data — and today is just the first of a series of meetings — which in turn we will take to Congress for funding of whatever solution is recommended," said Griffin, the state environmental secretary.

Tamara Summerfield, chairwoman of the Quapaw tribe's business committee, told the group that about 70 percent of the land in the area is owned by Quapaw tribal members and is federal trust land. Other tribal leaders said the solution selected by the federal agencies will have to be considered for any impact downstream on other tribal lands and Grand Lake.

Griffin said the governor's task force recommended a combination of creating a "world class wetland" and tallgrass prairie in the area, in which natural settling and absorption of the lead and minerals would occur.

That would require a federal buyout of residents in Picher and Cardin. John Sparkman, chairman of the ad hoc Tar Creek Basin Advisory Committee, has advocated moving the towns to maintain their community identity.

After Tuesday's tour, the federal technical team was to meet today in Miami for discussions.

Griffin said the team will reassemble for meetings as preparations begin for a proposed Army Corps of Engineers feasibility study of the wetlands project. Oklahoma is being asked to provide \$300,000 in matching funds for a like amount of federal money to start the study. It would take about three years.

Picher Mayor Sam Freeman said he thinks the project "is going to get something done a lot quicker than it was being handled."

"This has focused a lot bigger spotlight on Picher for these federal folks, and I think they're going to get us some results — at least I hope so," he said.

A.L. "Soupy" Suman, a lifelong Picher resident, was less optimistic after the tour. "They have enough federal money in that group to plug two mine shafts with money, but they're not going to fix it this time, either," he said.

Danny Frazier, who was born and raised in Picher, said he's ready for a buyout and to move somewhere else. "This is my hometown, but enough is enough," he said, pointing out that the hosts of the tour were using bottled water to prepare coffee for the group. "That says it all right there."