

6-20-02 Clips

Miami, Picher school remediation may be start of more work

By Randy Petersen
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Environmental Protection Agency contractors are gearing up to start removing lead-contaminated soil from Miami and Picher school grounds as they continue testing other high-access areas throughout the county.

“There are other things going on in the county,” CH2MHILL project manager Ted Telisak said Tuesday during a forum to discuss planned work in Miami and Picher.

The remediation efforts set to start in mid-July stem from tests conducted earlier this year on 14 Miami school yards and a piece of Ottawa County Reclamation Authority land that is slated to be donated to the Picher-Cardin School District.

The tests revealed six Miami properties and the Picher land contained soil with lead content of more than 500 parts per million — the level deemed contaminated by EPA standards. The EPA has not been able to define how lead from the former Tri-State Mining District reached Miami schools, but several officials noted past practices of using mine waste as construction material.

Starting next month, contaminated soil will be removed from those areas and replaced with new soil. Work is set to wrap up by Aug. 15 to avoid students returning to school.

“Operating heavy equipment around children — we don’t want to be doing that,” Telisak said.

Telisak said CH2MHILL has completed other testing in public parks and daycare centers in Miami, but will wait to release the results in a single report that includes high-access areas throughout the county, including school grounds in Wyandotte, Fairland, Afton and Turkey Ford school districts.

Former Tar Creek Superfund Site Remedial Project Manager Bob Sullivan said including all the results in a single report is a cost-saving measure.

“The more we break this up, the more it costs,” he said. He noted Miami schools were singled out because preliminary studies showed high levels of lead. In addition, the work could be completed in

the summer if started early enough.

Sullivan said other school districts being tested don't show obvious signs of lead contamination.

No deadline for the final report has been set, but new Remedial Project Manager Mike McAteer said he expects a report to be finalized later this summer.

If one of the districts is found to have high lead levels, Sullivan said it could be given priority for cleanup.

"Only a school — public or private — would have priority," he said.

In addition to schools, daycare centers and parks, CH2MHILL has started testing pow wow grounds and other areas requested by Native American tribes in Ottawa County.