

## Tar Creek adds cleanup positions

By Gary Garton  
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MIAMI, Okla. — The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality is creating two new positions in the bureaucracy linked to the Tar Creek Superfund cleanup site.

Dennis Dayton, with the state agency, said Tuesday it will have a water quality office in Grove and a Tar Creek “management” office in Oklahoma City.

The positions are funded in the new state budget but have not yet been filled.

Dayton said the Grove office will focus on water quality in the entire Tar Creek watershed, including the Neosho and Spring rivers and Grand Lake.

He said the office will not go beyond the scope of issues relating to heavy metals and other pollution from the Superfund work, but it could be expanded in the future to take in other water issues such as runoff from livestock and poultry farms.

The Oklahoma City management office will collect and correlate data from all the agencies involved in Tar Creek work.

The announcement came during a meeting Tuesday of stakeholders — those with an interest in the Superfund work. On hand were representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Environmental Quality, the Ottawa County Health Department, the Tribal Environmental Action Against Lead group, the Local Environmental Action Demanded group, and two other residents’ groups advocating different solutions to the problems.

Dust control during the movement of chat piles in the Picher, Cardin and Commerce areas was a major topic of discussion.

Susan Waldron with the county health department said dust is the key route for lead absorption in children. Controlling dust is the key to controlling elevated blood-lead levels, she said.

Rafael Casanova, with EPA’s Region 6 headquarters in Dallas, said guidelines have been formulated for what the agency believes are safe

methods of moving chat without generating excessive dust. The guidelines have been sent to all the agencies, but he said the EPA does not have any enforcement authority if they are violated.

Sally Whitecrow, with the tribal group, said it is finding that many of the children in Picher are still not aware of the dangers of lead. The group is conducting a series of summer activities for children 7 to 12. The activities, including art, crafts and games, all are centered around discussions of lead dangers.

John Sparkman of Picher presented the group with a survey his Tar Creek Steering Committee conducted in what he said was a door-to-door poll of 650 residents from the Picher and Cardin area. Sparkman said about 80 percent to 85 percent of those responding favored a federal buyout of Picher and Cardin.

Bill Lake, whose Speak Out group opposes a buyout or moving the towns, gave the representatives of the EPA and the state environmental agency copies of the group's proposal to form a coalition of agencies and local residents to supervise the various issues in the cleanup work.

"We feel like it's possible to make Picher a better place to live, and that's our goal," he said.