

Carson to speak at Tar Creek Conference

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A national conference that attempts to focus attention on Tar Creek begins Wednesday with a primer on the Superfund site and concludes Saturday with tours of toxic sites in Ottawa County.

"This is a chance for everyone who is interested in the Superfund site to get together and talk about a wide variety of issues," said Rebecca Jim, director of Local Environmental Action Demanded, or LEAD, a Tar Creek activist group.

Now in its fifth year, the conference was begun by LEAD and is co-sponsored by the Cherokee Volunteer Society at Miami High School, the Seneca-Cayuga, Miami and Quapaw tribal environmental offices, Fathers of Picher and Quapaw Students, Tribal Efforts Against Lead Clanmothers, the Miami Tribe, the Quapaw Tribe, the Ottawa Tribe, the Wyandotte Nation and the Sierra Club.

Other agencies and organizations participating in the annual conference will be the Ottawa County Health Department, Integris Baptist Regional Health Center, student groups from the Picher, Quapaw and Miami schools, the Cherokee Nation Service Learning program, the Harvard School of Public Health, the Tribal Efforts Against Lead program, Northeastern Oklahoma A&M College and the City of Miami.

Between 200 and 250 environmental activists and scientists are expected to travel to Miami for this year's conference, Jim said.

This year's session is expected to be highlighted by speeches from Oklahoma Secretary of the Environment Miles Tolbert and U.S. Rep. Brad Carson.

Tolbert is scheduled to speak at 9:15 a.m. Thursday and Carson at 3 p.m. Friday. Both speeches will take place at the Miami Civic Center.

Earl Dotter, a Washington, D.C.-based photographer, will be awarded the Tar Creek Excellence for Photojournalism Award Wednesday night during a mixer at the Coleman Theater. An exhibit of Dotter's photographs of people living and working in the Superfund site will also be displayed during the mixer. Two other photographers, Vaughn Waskovich, a University of Missouri photojournalism instructor, and Bob Tigert, a Nashville-based photographer, will also exhibit work during the mixer. The event is scheduled to begin at 7 p.m.

Other conference sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday at the Civic Center and are open to the public.

Tar Creek 101, a session designed to examine the history of the 40-square-mile Superfund site and the ramifications of living and working in and around the site, is scheduled to kick off the conference Wednesday afternoon.

"This is a session that everybody who wants to get up to speed on Tar Creek needs to attend," Jim said.

The session will be taught by Gary Lawley, an environmental scientist who is technical advisor to LEAD, and will begin at 2 p.m. at the Miami Civic Center.

Residents of Ottawa and Delaware counties can attend the session, and most other sessions, for

free although there is a charge for meals.

The conference will end Saturday with a tour of environmentally damaged sites in Ottawa County that includes a 10K walk, run and biking route, plus a 19-mile van ride. A \$10 fee includes a T-shirt and brunch.