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**Official: Senator's staff has visited Tar Creek**

By K.E. Sturgeon III  
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PICHER — A state environmental official said Monday that staff members working for an Oklahoma senator and a Senate committee he heads have toured the Tar Creek Superfund site several times in the past six months.

“I just think they wanted to look at the site and learn about it without any pressure,” said Mary Jane Calvey, an Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality official who has been on the tours.

Calvey declined to specifically name anyone who had been on the tours but said the tours lasted between two and three hours and included hiking through the site.

Calvey said the individuals on the tour came from the office of U.S. Sen. Jim Inhofe and the environment and public works committee he chairs. She said EPA and other federal officials working at the site joined the staff members on the tours.

The tours were apparently part of a fact-finding mission organized to gather information for a cleanup plan, Calvey said.

She said that Inhofe had not been on any of the tours. She also said that no Picher city officials had been present during the outings.

Word of the tours infuriated Picher residents at a meeting of the Tar Creek Basin Steering Committee Monday.

“What’s the big secret?” said Gloria Garner, a Picher resident and member of the committee. “Why can’t any of them talk to us or let us show them around.”

Recent statements by Inhofe that he has visited Picher and the Tar Creek site numerous times have caused controversy among local activists, who have extended an open invitation to Inhofe for a Picher town hall meeting.

Inhofe has not responded to the invitation.

“No one can recall him ever coming to Picher,” said John Sparkman, a Picher resident who chairs the steering committee. “I’ve asked all over town and no one has been contacted by him or any member of his staff.”

The steering committee, composed of residents and government officials who reside in the Tar Creek Superfund site, met Monday in the commons area of Picher-Cardin High

School to discuss strategy in the wake of a federal report that attempts to address some of the problems in the Superfund site.

A draft version of the report apparently recommends moving residents out of the 40-square-mile contaminated site, but a final report emphasizes cleanup and says residents should only be moved if federal authorities decide the area should be flooded as part of a flood control project.

“To finally see the report released and have it not endorse relocation was disconcerting,” steering committee member Ed Keheley said.

Keheley said that the committee was planning to organize a letter writing campaign in an effort to convince Inhofe to visit Picher and answer resident’s questions.

Efforts are also under way to organize area government agencies in the effort to convince federal officials to take action on relocation of Superfund site residents.

“We need to get all united on this,” Garner said. “We need to get our county government behind us and we need to get the city behind us.”