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### **Oklahoma lawmaker asks EPA to probe report**

**From AP, staff reports**

PICHER, Okla. - U.S. Rep. Brad Carson requested an investigation Tuesday into the revision of a report on the Tar Creek Superfund Site, saying the changes raise concerns of impropriety.

And, a Picher resident who helped conduct a congressional subcommittee tour of Tar Creek said Tuesday there is no doubt in his mind that the panel's report has been altered.

John Sparkman said he sat in on that group's last meeting before the members returned to Washington, D.C. He said there was a consensus among them that nothing could be done to guarantee the safety of people living in the Superfund area.

"The only way they saw to deal with the problem was to get the people out," Sparkman said.

Carson, D-Okla., asked the Inspector General's Office of the Environmental Protection Agency to investigate the changes to the report and under whose authority they were made.

The study was released in the names of scientists "who had never been consulted on material changes to their work," Carson and Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., ranking member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, wrote in a letter to Inspector General Nikki Tinsley.

"We have serious concerns that improper and unethical actions led to unwarranted revisions of the feasibility report," they wrote.

The Council on Environmental Quality report released last month qualified support for relocating residents who live at the center of the contaminated site. That represented a key change from an Aug. 6, 2002, draft version of the report, which said a federal technical team favored relocation. A member of the technical team that conducted the study said later that he had not approved the changes.

Sparkman said a source, whom he would not identify, saw a copy of the committee's draft report dated in August 2002 and told him that the final report issued in April was different and had been changed from the draft copy.

A local group Sparkman formed three years ago, calling itself the Tar Creek Basin Steering Committee, has sent letters to elected officials ranging from President Bush to Oklahoma's congressional delegation, asking them to sit down with local residents and discuss the issues.

"If they really want the facts without having them filtered through a bureaucratic report, they need to come out and see for themselves," Sparkman said.

The complaint by Carson and Dingell also asks the inspector general to examine the Department of the Interior's role in the report. The agency is potentially a responsible party at the site, which largely falls on Indian land.

Carson alleges the changes were made to "whitewash" the report.

"The people of Picher and Cardin deserve an answer as to what happened, and why Washington bureaucrats felt the need to edit a comprehensive report in the name of the experts and scientists," he said. "It is my hope that this will shed some light on a process that has been left in the dark for too long."

The Department of the Interior, the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers all contributed to the report, which examined a plan by former Gov. Frank Keating to turn the former mining site into a wetlands.

After 20 years on the Superfund list, the site continues to be plagued by lead contamination, acid mine water in Tar Creek, and the danger of collapses and open mine shafts.

The technical team visited Tar Creek in January 2002 and convened in March of that year to reach a consensus on its findings, the complaint said.

The revised report was released under the names of the members of the technical team.

In one case, the report's wording was changed from "chat piles pose continued risk to community health" to "chat piles pose potential risk to community health."

Carson favors the voluntary relocation of residents of Picher and Cardin, something Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., has not supported.

Inhofe, chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, emphasized at the time of the report's release that it did not endorse any part of Keating's proposal.