

State Water Resources Control Board

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NEWS from the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board & Department of Toxics Substances Control

State Agencies, State Parks, and Mining Company Agree to Start Pollution Control and Cleanup at Empire Mine State Historic Park, Grass Valley

RANCHO CORDOVA-- The historic, but polluted gold mine which is now a state park in Grass Valley is working to address its environmental issues under the agencies' first-ever combined order. The Department of Toxics Substances Control (DTSC), Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Parks and Recreation and Newmont USA Limited signed a Cleanup and Abatement and Partial Consent Order for the Empire Mine State Historic Park. The unique agreement combines the regulatory authority of the Regional Water Board and DTSC into a single order to simplify compliance. It also provides for the Regional Water Board and DTSC to receive cost reimbursement for project oversight.

Regional Water Board Vice Chair Dr. Karl Longley said, "This agreement is a significant milestone in our work to clean up the legacy of mining in California and is the result of the collaborative efforts of state government and private industry."

"We are confident that we can accomplish the environmental cleanup that is necessary in a manner that will be safe for visitors to the park," said Department of Toxic Substances Control Director Maureen Gorsen. "This agreement will enable the state, local governments and concerned citizens to participate in a process that will ultimately provide protection to public health and the environment," Gorsen added.

The Empire Mine State Park's environmental issues stem and literally flow from the historic mining wastes and operations that contain arsenic, lead, and other metals. Identified areas of initial concern include a remnant mine waste stockpile, a large tailings impoundment, and a drain tunnel discharge known as the Magenta Drain. Controlling dust exposure for trail users and storm water pollution from the tailings are major goals of the current effort. California State Parks and Newmont are also investigating the drain tunnel and possible remedies for the discharge into Wolf Creek.

The agreement covers agency-approved, time-critical actions that have begun and will continue for the next several months. California State Parks and Newmont will cap the remnant stockpile that has been a source of storm water pollutants. They are also collecting water and sediment samples in the creek below the Magenta Drain and in nearby Memorial Park and are assessing possible treatment and cleanup actions. The state has sampled hiking trails throughout the park and taken initial response actions in several areas as necessary, to isolate toxics and eliminate the potential for human exposure. Finally, they will identify areas at the park (including several residences) where exposure to mining and mill wastes may present an elevated health risk. Where appropriate, they will address problems and create exclusion zones until a permanent remedy is determined.

The agreement recognizes that additional environmental work beyond 2006 is necessary at the park, and requires the preparation of a Public Participation Plan to identify the level of public interest and appropriate way(s) to include the public in additional environmental activities and decision-making. Later, the agencies and Newmont may also amend the order to cover additional phases of work.

The Empire Mine State Historic Park is the site of one of the oldest, largest, deepest, longest and richest gold mines in California. Active for more than 100 years, the mine produced 5.6 million ounces of gold before it closed in 1956. The park contains many of the mine's buildings, the owner's home and restored gardens, as well as the entrance to 367 miles of abandoned and flooded underground mine workings. This popular tourist destination covers over 800 acres, including forested backcountry and twelve miles of trails. Although access to areas of concern is restricted, the park remains open to the public.

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