



Anaconda Copper Mine cleanup transferred to state, private party

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(Photo: Amy Alonzo/Mason Valley News)

Less than two years after Gov. Brian Sandoval conditionally agreed to the Environmental Protection Agency listing Anaconda Copper Mine on its Superfund National Priorities List, the governor announced that instead Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) will fund cleanup of the site.

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Sandoval and Environmental Protection Agency Director Scott Pruitt on Monday signed a deferral agreement that transfers cleanup of the mine, located east of Yerington, away from the federal government. Instead, ARCO and the Nevada Department of Environmental Protection will oversee the site's cleanup, estimated to cost upward of \$100 million.

During a ceremony held behind locked gates on the mine property, local, state and national officials declared the signing "historic" and "a life-changer." The public was not invited to minimize any protesting, officials said.

"There was always a singular goal here – to protect the health, safety and welfare of the community," Sandoval said. The deferral agreement provides "a secure, reliable source of funding to get this done."



A deferral signed between Gov. Sandoval and the EPA Monday transfer cleanup responsibilities to the state and ARCO. (Photo: Amy Alonzo/Mason Valley News)

Not everyone was happy about Monday's announcement. Yerington Paiute Tribal Chairwoman Laurie Thom said the tribe was specifically excluded from the ceremony, describing it as "a slap in our face in our own backyard."

Last year the tribe filed a lawsuit in Yerington Paiute Tribal Court against ARCO and its owner, BP America, Inc., claiming the companies covered up the extent of contamination at the site, including toxins such as arsenic and uranium contaminating groundwater. The mine is located about nine miles from the tribe's reservation, and those who live on the reservation drink bottled water, Thom said.

"We've been fighting this for 30 years and nobody's done anything," she said. "My people have been on bottled water for 12 years. They can't sign away their responsibility. They can't do it."

"The reality of the situation is that EPA just dumped a very expensive site with a problem responsible party (ARCO) on an unprepared State of Nevada," concurred Dietrick McGinnis, an engineer and certified environmental manager working with the tribe.

The Anaconda Copper Mine is an open-pit mine on more than 3,400 acres that produced 400 acres of waste rock, 900 acres of contaminated tailings and 300 acres of disposal ponds between 1952 and 1978, according to the EPA. ARCO purchased the site in 1977 and shut down all operations in 1978.



"The Pit" at Anaconda Copper Mine. *(Photo: Amy Alonzo/Mason Valley News)*

The EPA requested placement of the mine on its national priority list in 2000, but the request was rejected by the state. In 2016 Sandoval conditionally agreed to the listing, stating there were no immediate concerns regarding the health of local residents and the listing would provide a "full and swift clean-up of the site." However, the state last summer sent the EPA a formal request to keep the site off the priority list.

Following Monday's ceremony, County Manager Jeff Page said the deferral agreement moves the cleanup process along and guarantees funding "on the private sector's dime, not the public sector's." There was no guarantee of funding while the site remained on the EPA's list, he said.

Visibly beaming, Sandoval called Pruitt "a man of his word" and said he was "really excited about today."



Atlantic Richfield company President Robert Genovese speaks during the ceremony. *(Photo: Amy Alonzo/Mason Valley News)*

ARCO President Bob Genovese said the cleanup, estimated to take 10 years, will be "a giant undertaking." ARCO will be cleaning up not only its portion of the property, but orphan shares of the property as well. The cleanup involves contouring the property and placing caps that will prevent toxins from leaching into the groundwater, he said.

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