



Sherwood, Washington | Disposal Site

AN UMTRCA TITLE II SITE

This fact sheet provides information about the **Sherwood disposal site**. This site is managed by the **U.S. Department of Energy Office of Legacy Management** under **Title II of the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978**.

Site Information and History

The Sherwood disposal site is a former uranium-ore processing site operated by Western Nuclear, Inc. The site is in Stevens County near the town of Wellpinit, in eastern Washington on the Spokane Indian Reservation, about 35 miles northwest of the city of Spokane.

Western Nuclear used an acid-leach process to extract uranium from ore hauled from an open pit mine 0.5 mile from the mill. The capacity of the mill was about 2,100 tons of ore per day. Milling operations began in 1978, and the mill closed in 1984 because of a decline in the uranium market. The historical mission of the mill was to provide uranium concentrate exclusively to private industry. Mill decommissioning began in 1992, and all cleanup and reclamation activities were completed by 1996.

Milling operations produced radioactive tailings, a predominantly sandy material. The tailings, along with mill site soils, building equipment, and debris contaminated with tailings and low-level radioactivity, were encapsulated in an engineered disposal cell constructed on the mill site. The acid-leached tailings were neutralized with lime before disposal. The disposal cell contains about 2.9 million tons (2.4 million cubic yards) of uranium mill tailings and an additional 350,000 cubic yards of contaminated mill site materials with a total activity of 470 curies of radium-226.

Regulatory Setting

Congress passed the Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act (UMTRCA) in 1978 (Public Law 95- 604). The Sherwood site is under the jurisdiction of Title II of UMTRCA, which applies to uranium mill sites that were under active U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) license when UMTRCA was passed. Under Title II of UMTRCA, the licensee, Western Nuclear, Inc., was responsible for remedial action. The Washington State licensing program for UMTRCA Title II sites operates under state regulations as part of the NRC Agreement State program. The Washington State Department of Health and Environment was the regulator for Western Nuclear until the state radioactive materials license was terminated at completion of remediation in accordance with NRC requirements. Title II of the legislation specifies that after reclamation is complete, long-term custody of the site is the responsibility of either the federal government or the host state, at the option of the state. Because the disposal site is on the Spokane Indian Reservation, which is owned by the federal government and held in trust for the tribe, the responsibility for the long-term care of the site belongs to the federal government. No state agreement of transfer is required to convey property rights for the site to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). An agreement for long-term surveillance, maintenance, and permanent access, which allows DOE to fulfill its custodial responsibilities required for UMTRCA sites, was executed between the Spokane Tribe of

Indians and DOE. NRC's cleanup and reclamation standards are promulgated in Title 10 *Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR), Part 40, Appendix A. These standards conform to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards in 40 CFR 192. DOE became the licensee under NRC's general license for long-term custody in March 2001.

Disposal Site

The mill site property covers about 380 acres, including the 100-acre disposal cell. The cell is located approximately in the center of a 730-acre drainage basin, which is enclosed on the north, east, and west sides by outcrops of quartz monzonite bedrock. The cell overlies sandy alluvial soil that ranges in thickness from zero at the bedrock interface to about 200 feet at monitoring wells immediately downgradient (south) of the cell.

Groundwater is present at the base of the alluvial material and in the weathered upper 50 feet of underlying bedrock. No contamination has been detected in groundwater downgradient of the disposal cell. Because of the tailings neutralization process, only a few contaminants (arsenic, nickel, thallium, radium, and uranium) were identified in pore fluid within the tailings in concentrations above background or state or federal standards. No groundwater remediation is planned. DOE conducts annual groundwater monitoring at one background well and two downgradient wells as a best management practice. Groundwater samples are analyzed for chloride, sulfate, and total dissolved solids.

Land surrounding the Sherwood site provides habitat for wildlife and is used for logging and livestock grazing. Wildlife and livestock have access to the unfenced disposal site.

Disposal Cell Design

A containment dam was constructed at the downgradient end of the disposal cell to enclose the disposal cell drainage area, and a 6-inch layer of riprap (rocks) was placed on the downslope face of the containment dam to control erosion. The disposal cell has a synthetic liner on the bottom and sides and is capped with 12 to 20 feet of uncompacted sandy and clayey-sandy soil to control radon flux. The cover includes 6 inches of topsoil that was vegetated with native grasses, forbs, shrubs, and trees. A drainage channel along the perimeter of the disposal cell is designed to intercept overland flow and convey storm water around and away from the cell. The perimeter drainage channel is lined with riprap to control erosion.

Legacy Management Activities

The DOE Office of Legacy Management (LM) manages the Sherwood disposal site according to a site-specific Long-Term Surveillance Plan to ensure that the disposal cell systems continue to prevent release of contaminants to the environment. Under provisions of this plan, LM conducts annual inspections of the site to evaluate the condition of surface features, performs site maintenance as necessary, and monitors groundwater to verify the continued integrity of the disposal cell.

In accordance with 40 CFR 192.32, the disposal cell is designed to be effective for 1,000 years, to the extent reasonably achievable, and, in any case, for at least 200 years. However, the general license has no expiration date, and LM's responsibility for the safety and integrity of the Sherwood disposal cell will last indefinitely.

Contact Information

In case of an emergency at the site contact 911.

LM toll-free emergency hotline: **(877) 695-5322**

Site-specific documents related to the **Sherwood, Washington, Disposal Site** are available on the LM website at **www.energy.gov/lm/sherwood-washington-disposal-site**.

For more information about LM activities at the **Sherwood, Washington, Disposal Site**, contact:

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