

## **Entities agree to \$143 million Chevron Questa Mine cleanup settlement**

Staff report

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The U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the state of New Mexico have announced a settlement with Chevron Mining Inc. (CMI), requiring \$143 million in cleanup work at the Chevron Questa Mine Superfund site.

According to a news release, the company has agreed to perform a pilot project to cover about 275 acres of the tailings facility where mine waste, or "tailings," are stored. It covers operations of a water treatment plant and installation of groundwater extraction systems. CMI will also pay more than \$5.2 million to reimburse the EPA's past costs for overseeing cleanup work at the site.

The proposed partial consent decree, if approved by the court, will provide for the next phase of the cleanup at the former mine site. It is the largest settlement of its kind for cleanup work in EPA Region 6, which includes New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana. CMI has already completed a number of response projects at the site under previous agreements with EPA, including the cleanup of Eagle Rock Lake and the removal of numerous tailing spills.

The new work will improve efforts to permanently prevent contamination from the site from affecting the Red River and other water resources and further reduce risks for nearby communities and the surrounding environment. This includes covering and revegetating the tailings facility, improving and installing new systems that prevent contaminated water from reaching the Red River and operating and maintaining a water treatment plant. The settling parties will also monitor the remedy's long-term effectiveness at reducing risks to human health and the environment.

The Chevron Questa Mine, previously known as the Molycorp Mine, operated intermittently from 1919 until 2014, when Chevron permanently closed it. While the mine was operating, approximately 328 million tons of acid-generating waste rock were excavated and deposited in nine large waste rock piles. After molybdenum was extracted from ore, the tailing was transported by pipeline to a tailing facility, where it was deposited in tailing impoundments.

The cleanup is being accomplished under the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, commonly known as the "Superfund." The Superfund law protects human health and the environment while safeguarding taxpayer dollars by holding parties that contributed to contamination responsible for cleaning it up. Since 1980, the EPA's Superfund program has managed the cleanup of the nation's most hazardous waste sites and has responded to environmental emergencies, oil spills and natural disasters.



Pumps and dams like this one capture water in the underground tunnels of the Questa mine. Chevron plans to upgrade its pump system to dewater the underground area once the mine has been fully decommissioned.

J.R. Logan

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