



FACT SHEET

REMOVAL ACTION SITE UPDATE

Cherokee Zinc-Weir Smelter Superfund Site

Weir, Cherokee County, Kansas – September 2020

REGION 7: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Nine Tribal Nations

INTRODUCTION

The Chicago Zinc Company and several other companies owned and operated a primary zinc smelter from approximately 1872 until 1920 in Weir, Cherokee County, Kansas. Between 2004 and 2013, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) conducted soil testing at the former smelter as well as nearby properties. This sampling identified several properties with elevated lead levels, and KDHE requested the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Region 7, to further evaluate residential lead contamination in Weir associated with the former Cherokee Zinc smelter. These investigations have identified elevated levels of lead in residential yards in Weir that appear to be attributable to the former Cherokee Zinc smelter.

BACKGROUND

Metal smelting operations have often been associated with area-wide elevated levels of metal contamination. This is due to air deposition from their smokestacks, and from the reuse of the abundant waste material generated from ore smelting that often contains residual contaminants. While smelting operations can produce a number of different contaminants, lead is of particular concern due to its adverse cognitive effects on children under the age of 7 and fetal development during pregnancy.

RESIDENTIAL SAMPLING

If your property in Weir has not been sampled, and you would like to have your soil analyzed for lead, please contact EPA's On-Scene Coordinator for the Cherokee Zinc-Weir Smelter Superfund Site—formerly known as the Cherokee Zinc Company (Weir Smelter) Site (see **EPA Contact Information** on page 2).

ABOUT LEAD CONTAMINATION

Lead is a toxic metal that is harmful if inhaled or swallowed. EPA classifies lead as a probable human carcinogen and is a cumulative toxicant. Lead exposure can pose serious health risks, particularly for young children, pregnant women, and nursing mothers. Pregnant women and nursing mothers should avoid exposure to lead to protect their children. Children are more sensitive to lead than adults and can develop lifelong disabilities and behavior problems from lead exposure.

Children 7 years old and younger are most at risk from developing health effects from exposure to lead. Lead is particularly dangerous to children because their growing bodies absorb more lead than adults do, and their brains and nervous systems are more sensitive to the damaging effects of lead.

Babies and young children can also be more highly exposed to lead because they often put their hands and other objects into their mouths that can have lead from dust or soil on them. It is important that children in this age range be tested annually, because lead-poisoned children do not always look or act sick. It is important to know that exposure to even low levels of lead can severely harm children.

Exposure to lead can cause negative health effects in infants and young children, including, but not limited to:

- Nervous system and kidney damage
- Learning disabilities, attention-deficit disorder, and decreased intelligence
- Speech, language, and behavior problems
- Poor muscle coordination
- Decreased muscle and bone growth, and hearing damage

While low lead exposure is most common, exposure to high amounts of lead can have devastating effects on children and may include seizures, unconsciousness, and in some cases, death. Although children are especially susceptible to lead exposure, lead can be dangerous for adults, too. In adults, exposure to lead can cause:

- Harm to a developing fetus
- Increased chance of high blood pressure during pregnancy
- Fertility problems (in men and women)
- High blood pressure
- Digestive problems, nerve disorders, memory and concentration problems, and muscle and joint pain

PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM LEAD

To reduce lead exposure and its effects:

- Wash hands after playing outside and before meals
- Eat a diet high in calcium and iron (and low in fat)
- Regularly cleaning floors, windowsills, and other surfaces
- Regularly washing children's hands, bottles, pacifiers, and toys
- Remove shoes or wiping soil from shoes before entering your home

BLOOD LEAD TESTING

The only way to know if your child has elevated blood-lead levels is through a blood test. EPA encourages parents to have their children tested for lead exposure.

Talk to your pediatrician, general physician, or local health department about testing your child. Your doctor can do a simple blood test to check you or your child for lead exposure.

For local blood testing for children under 6 years of age and pregnant women, please contact **Cherokee County Health Department**, 110 East Walnut, Columbus, Kansas 66725, phone 620-429-3087, for blood lead testing by appointment.

NEXT STEPS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On September 3, 2020, the EPA proposed to place the site on the federal National Priorities List (NPL) Federal Register (85 FR 54970). The proposed listing is subject to a 60-day public review and comment period. Comments must be submitted (postmarked) on or before November 2, 2020. For more information about the NPL proposal, and technical assistance opportunities and grant, see EPA's recent public notice online at: www.epa.gov/ks/region-7-public-notice

Fact Sheets for Kansas Cleanup Sites are at: www.epa.gov/ks/kansas-cleanups

Additional information regarding the Cherokee Zinc-Weir Smelter Superfund Site is available at: <https://response.epa.gov/cherokeezinccompany> and the Administrative Record is available at: <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/Cherokeezincweirsmelter>

For information about lead, visit:

- www.epa.gov/lead
- www.epa.gov/lead/learn-about-lead
- www.epa.gov/superfund/lead-superfund-sites
- www.epa.gov/lead/fight-lead-poisoning-healthy-diet
- www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/
- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/tp.asp?id=96&tid=22
- www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/tfacts13.pdf

EPA CONTACT INFORMATION

For questions or site information, contact:

James A. Johnson
On-Scene Coordinator
Phone: 913-551-7058
Email: johnson.james@epa.gov

Elizabeth Kramer
Community Involvement Coordinator
Phone: 913-551-7186
Email: kramer.elizabeth@epa.gov
(See mailing address below.)