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## **Environmental health assessment completed at Lower Bridge Mine**

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Oregon public health officials have completed an environmental health consultation on the Lower Bridge Mine in Deschutes County. A report was released today by the Environmental Health Assessment Program (EHAP) in the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division, which later this month will announce details of a May public information session.

The report about the abandoned mine, located 5.5 miles west of [Terrebonne](#), contains recommendations for the property owners to sample both soil and water on the site before the land is developed for residential use. Officials also are recommending air monitoring to determine if the area's wind-blown dust contains crystalline silica.

Dave Farrer, program toxicologist, says EHAP may provide additional assessment services if the site's owners decide to develop the 557-acre site for residential use.

Farrer says the site's most significant current risk is the physical hazard posed to trespassers entering the old mine operation's dilapidated buildings. Otherwise, he says, EHAP found that health risks to nearby residents are very low. However, the data were insufficient to fully rule out potential health risks from wind-blown dust at the site.

### **EHAP is recommending that site owners:**

- Collect more soil samples to determine if there are any areas of high crystalline silica content, which is of concern to people in nearby communities;
- Monitor the area's air at different times of year to determine if there is crystalline silica in the wind-blown dust; and

- Monitor groundwater beneath the site to verify that the underlying aquifer remains uncontaminated, since future residents would rely on the aquifer for domestic water use.

“We urge site owners to continue dust-suppression efforts regardless of how this site is used in the future,” Farrer says.

If the land owners develop the property, Farrer says, EHAP will work with site owners, the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the Deschutes County Planning Commission to ensure recommendations are followed before development begins.

Lower Bridge Mine operated as a diatomaceous earth mine for several decades starting in the early 1900s. Once mining operations ceased in the 1970s, the site was used illegally as a hazardous waste storage facility. DEQ oversaw a clean-up of the hazardous waste in the mid-1980s. Public interest in the site was rekindled when the Deschutes County Planning Commission was considering rezoning it for residential development. The decision to rezone was finalized in December 2008.

EHAP was asked by a state legislator to conduct a health consultation to determine whether any health risks were associated with the site.

For the full report, go to [www.healthoregon.org/ehap/](http://www.healthoregon.org/ehap/) on the DHS Web site.