

JOSLYN STREET TAILINGS | HELENA, MONTANA

The Joslyn Street Tailings (JST) Facility is an approximately 131-acre area located at the intersection of Joslyn and Brady streets in Helena. Ore was processed at the Facility in the late 1930's, leaving mill tailings as a waste product. This resulted in contamination of soil and groundwater with arsenic and lead. In the late 1990's, BNSF Railway (BNSF), the lead liable party, performed a voluntary cleanup of visible tailings, placing 12,743 cubic yards into a lined and capped on-site repository.

On November 12, 2019, DEQ selected the final cleanup remedy for the JST Facility with the publication of the Record of Decision (ROD). The selected remedy included soil excavation and off-site disposal at a licensed landfill, monitoring natural attenuation for groundwater, long-term monitoring, and institutional controls (ICs).

JULY 2026 UPDATE

DEQ approved of BNSF's Remedial Design Work Plan (RDWP) in September 2020 and BNSF began implementing the remedy in 2021. BNSF has nearly completed the required soil excavation and disposal work. All contaminated soils have been removed except on BNSF properties where the excavations were either constrained by digging into the BNSF rail line or potentially damaging the on-site repository. To address these areas, BNSF proposed using a remedial alternative discussed in the ROD, but not selected as part of DEQ's final remedy for the contaminated soils remaining at the Facility: a low permeability clay cap with a cover system.

The low permeability clay cap with a cover system would be composed of two feet of soil that includes: the low permeability clay layer, backfilled soil material, and vegetative cover. This system would be placed over and around the remaining areas where site specific cleanup levels (SSCLs) are exceeded.

DEQ has evaluated this remedy modification within its July 2026 Explanation of Significant Differences (ESD). The purpose of the ESD is to identify a change that DEQ proposes to integrate into the JST Facility cleanup plan and verifies that the cleanup plan is protective of public health, safety, and welfare and the environment and complies with environmental laws. The ESD determined that the remedy modification will not only prevent direct contact exposure to soils that exceed SSCLs, but it will also limit infiltration through the soils, thus, limiting leaching of soil contamination to groundwater. This modification will be combined with engineering and institutional controls, i.e. fencing and deed restrictions, to ensure the low permeability clay cap and cover system are not disturbed or compromised.

DEQ's ESD is temporarily posted online on the DEQ website, accessible at the following location (<https://deq.mt.gov/public/publicnotice>) or by scanning the QR code to the right:



Excavated Soil on South Side of BNSF Rail



NEXT STEPS

BNSF will develop a work plan to implement this remedy modification to the specific areas where construction constraints have been encountered. DEQ anticipates these actions to occur in 2026 or early 2027. There are also areas of the Facility that still require backfilling. That work is anticipated to occur in 2026. BNSF is required to control weeds and revegetate all areas where excavations have occurred and backfill placed. Ongoing monitoring activities, including groundwater monitoring and vegetation surveys will continue to occur to ensure that the implemented remedies are successful and groundwater conditions improve.

For more information, contact DEQ Environmental Project Officer Robert Roll at (406) 444-6438 or via email at rroll@mt.gov.



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