

Gold Mines to Pay \$618,000 for Pollution

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SCOTT SONNER, Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has ordered three northern Nevada gold mines to pay a total of \$618,000 for failing to report the release of toxic chemicals, including cyanide, lead and mercury from 2005-08.

All three mines are subsidiaries of the Toronto-based Barrick Gold Corp. — Barrick Cortez Inc.'s Cortez Gold Mine near Crescent Valley, Barrick Gold US Inc.'s Ruby Hill Gold Mine near Eureka and Homestake Mining Co.'s Bald Mountain Gold Mine near the Ruby Lake National Wildlife Refuge.

The three agreed to pay a total of \$278,000 in fines and spend an additional \$340,000 on an environmentally beneficial project as part of a settlement for allegedly under estimating reports of their toxic release inventory required under the federal Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, EPA officials said.

"Cyanide, lead and mercury used at these mines have the potential to pose a health threat," said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest Region based in San Francisco.

"We insist on accurate reporting of chemical releases so that citizens have a clear idea of the risk from the facilities near their communities," he said. He added there is no evidence to suggest that the violations posed any immediate danger to workers at the facilities or neighboring communities.

The supplemental project will be conducted at the Cortez mine to identify the metal compounds formed in its oxide mill process and test methods to verify the quantities of new chemical compounds manufactured during the process.

The companies also agreed to perform audits at all other U.S. mining operations Barrick owns in Nevada and Montana, determine if any reporting violations occurred and if so pay a \$10,000 penalty per violation up to a total of \$250,000

Barrick officials said EPA disputed fewer than 40 of the 330 related reports the companies filed during the time period.

"Barrick disagrees with EPA's position and the company's operations have complied in good faith with all requirements of annual TRI reporting since (first established in) 1998," said Louis Schack, director of communications for Barrick Gold of North America based in Salt Lake City, Utah.

"Nonetheless, to achieve regulatory certainty regarding its TRI obligations, Barrick has agreed to enter into a settlement agreement with EPA," he said Wednesday.

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