

BLM testing for silver-mine-era hazards near Calico

Aaron Dome, Barstow Desert Dispatch, 10-1-10

CALICO -- Silver mining operations disappeared from Calico long ago, but potentially hazardous minerals left in their wake may remain.

The Bureau of Land Management is currently testing mineral trails from a long-abandoned mine near Calico for potentially toxic heavy metals.

Jamie Livingood, geologist with the BLM, said that the metals occur naturally and were exposed during the enrichment process when silver was mined. When the miners left, the trail of minerals was left behind.

“Miners crushed and processed rock to get to the silver, and the silver was (near) other heavy metals,” said Livingood. “We want to see if there are metals in the tailings and if they have been concentrated.”

The mine is located south of Calico Ghost Town and to the east of a residential area east of Ghost Town road and bordered by Lakeview Street to the north, Oasis Street to the South, and Treasure Avenue to the East. An off-road vehicle trail also runs through the area.

Livingood said that contractors working at the site are taking measures to reduce dust, including spraying water on the area, but BLM is advising residents in the area to shut their windows and avoid strenuous outdoor activities as a precautionary measure.

The BLM took surface samples at the site several years ago that showed elevated levels of heavy metals and wanted study the area further, said Livingood. While the mine itself is on private property, the trailings have drifted onto public BLM lands.

Small particles of hazardous metals left over from mining operations are small enough to become airborne and be inhaled by people near the testing site, said BLM resource director Mickey Quillman.

Work at the site is expected to last until Oct. 10. The BLM will make a decision on what action to take once testing results are analyzed.