

## Deal Is Reached to Clean Up Polluted Mine in California

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

**S**ACRAMENTO, Calif., Oct. 21 — More than \$800 million will be spent to clean up one of the nation's most toxic Superfund sites, a defunct copper mine that spews neon-green water.

Federal scientists have called the highly acidic water coming from the site, the **Iron Mountain Mine**, the worst in the world.

The agreement between federal and state environmental officials and Aventis CropScience USA, announced on Thursday, ensures that 95 percent of the mine water will be treated before it reaches the Sacramento River system.

"As recently as five years ago, this site dumped the equivalent of 150 tanker cars full of toxic metals into the Sacramento River each day during winter storms," said Felicia Marcus, a regional administrator for the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

The cleanup has cost more than \$200 million so far.

The site near Redding, about 170 miles north of Sacramento, was a copper mine for more than 100 years and contains miles of tunnels, said Tom Bloomfield, an agency lawyer. The tunnels expose iron sulfate in the pyrite deposit below the mountain to water and the oxygen in the air, forming sulfuric acid.

The treatment plant costs about \$4.5 million a year to run and will have to be operated "in perpetuity," said Winston Hickox, head of the California Environmental Protection Agency.

The site will probably never be completely cleaned, so the best solution



The Associated Press

The treatment plant at the Iron Mountain Mine, near Redding, Calif., which is severely polluted.

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that thrives in the highly acidic conditions. The microbe, discovered earlier this year, speeds up the dissolution of iron in the water.

The Iron Mountain Mine is one of about 1,200 sites in the federal Superfund program, which aims to force businesses to pay to clean up pollution they created or contributed to.

The mine made the list in 1983, when it was owned by Stauffer Chemical Company. Stauffer was absorbed by the French company Rhone-Poulenc, which in turn merged in 1999 with a German company, Hoechst, to form Aventis, one of the world's largest chemical, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies.

Aventis, based in France, agreed to pay \$160 million now for an insurance policy that will pay up to \$300 million in cleanup costs over the next 30 years if it is needed, plus a final \$514 million payment in 2030.

The agreement releases the company from future liability, he said.

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