

Smurfit-Stone Site

Background Information & Timeline

BACKGROUND: The Smurfit-Stone pulp mill operated on the banks of the Clark Fork River near Frenchtown, Montana from 1957 to 2010. Fifteen years since closure, this site continues to leach hazardous chemicals into the aquifer and the river. In 2015 the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that International Paper, WestRock, and Wakefield are responsible for cleanup, and began site studies. However, after a decade of assessment, full site characterization is still incomplete, and cleanup seems at *least* another decade away.

BRIEF HISTORY

1956 Waldorf Paper Products Co. announced construction of a pulp and paper mill near Frenchtown, MT. Doors opened in 1957. Over the mill's 54-year lifetime, the site grew to more than 3,200 acres in size and included a 140-acre unlined, hazardous waste dump area, and a 900-acre patchwork of unlined, wastewater ponds separated from the river by a four-mile bulldozed gravel berm. These ponds were built in the floodplain of the Clark Fork River and were designed to hold wastewater temporarily, until water returned to the Clark Fork River. The ponds are now empty, though soils and groundwater remain contaminated. The berm is unlicensed, largely unregulated, and was never designed to serve as a flood-control structure.

Between 1957 and 1998 mill ownership and name changed several times: Hoerner-Waldorf Corp., Champion International, Stone Container, and finally in 1998, Smurfit-Stone Container Corp.

1986 Montana citizens, organized as the newly formed Clark Fork Coalition, successfully prevented the state from issuing a permit for the site to dump wastes year-round directly into the river.

2009 Plant permanently closes on December 31.

2011 EPA begins initial investigation into site contamination.

2013 Smurfit is proposed for listing as a Superfund site.

2013 MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) issues fish consumption advisory downstream of the site.

2015 EPA and the responsible parties sign Administrative Order of Consent (AOC) to clean up the site; site assessments begin that same year.

2017 The Frenchtown/Smurfit-Stone Community Advisory Group (CAG) was formed.

2018–2019 FWP collects additional fish tissue samples upstream and downstream of the site.

2020 FWP extends its fish consumption advisory to include additional section of the Bitterroot and Clark Fork Rivers upstream and downstream of the site.

2022 Missoula County Commissioners ask EPA regional administrator for additional characterization sampling at the site.

2024 CFC commissions an independent flood risk study to better understand berm vulnerabilities.

2025 The Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes issue a Tribal fish consumption advisory more restrictive than the state advisory.



Photo: Chris Boyer | Kestrel Aerial

SMURFIT'S LEGACY OF WASTE

During operations the mill produced:

- **300 billion gallons** of wastewater
- **800,000 tons** of sludge
- **5.3 million cubic yards** of mill wastes
- **1.6 million tons** of dioxin generating bleached pulp

Some of these wastes contain extremely hazardous substances (often in direct contact with groundwater which is hydrologically connected to the river), including, but not limited to:

- **PCBs, Dioxins, and Furans**
- **Lead**
- **Arsenic**

After decades of citizen action and tens of millions invested in restoration, the economically and culturally important Clark Fork River is finally on the mend. And yet the contaminated Smurfit-Stone site continues to pollute the river we've all worked so hard to clean up. We can clean up the hazardous wastes at Smurfit, remove the berm, and restore the Clark Fork to its natural floodplain.

The Clark Fork Coalition and partners including the Community Advisory Group call on the EPA to provide data that clearly explains the relationship between site wastes and the Clark Fork River, a public resource held in trust for all. Only then can a remedy to clean and redevelop the site be adequately assessed and accepted by the community.



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