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Friday, April 29, 2005

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## Community News

### EPA OKs North Ridge move

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By DYLAN DARLING

Most residents of the North Ridge Estates subdivision will be calling a new place home for the summer.

Federal officials ordered a voluntary, temporary relocation Wednesday evening for 27 households in the asbestos-contaminated subdivision about three miles from Klamath Falls on Old Fort Road.

Representatives of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began notifying residents immediately.

"This relocation is voluntary for residents, but EPA believes it is appropriate for immediate reduction of the risk to the public and the environment from the uncontrolled release of asbestos at the site," according to an action memo signed by EPA officials.

The temporary relocation will run from June 10 to Sept. 10. The memo was approved and signed by Daniel Opalski, EPA Region 10 Office of Environmental Cleanup director, at 6 p.m. Wednesday.

Soon thereafter, Judy Smith, EPA community involvement coordinator, was going door to door at the subdivision to pass out copies of the memo to the 27 households who could be on the move.

The three-month relocation is expected to cost up to \$300,398, according to the memo.

While the government is covering the cost now, the bill may be passed on to MBK Partnership, the Klamath Falls company that developed the subdivision, Smith said. Under the terms of an



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agreement with the government, MBK has been held responsible for the agency's cleanup and study of the site.

For now, the focus is on setting up the details of the relocation.

"We'll worry about who is going to pay later," Smith said.

The EPA's reasons for relocation are as follows:

- Health threats: Uncontrolled exposure to contamination, exacerbated during hot, dry summer months.
- Safety of residents: Field sampling and cleanup may generate further releases of contaminants.
- Efficiency of response action: Temporary relocation minimizes concerns about noise, property access, and other restrictions on the hours or types of response activities that may be conducted.

On Tuesday the Klamath Board of County Commissioners told Smith North Ridge residents should be moved while studies continue, echoing a letter by U.S. Rep. Greg Walden to EPA officials the week before.

Residents in all the households within the footprint of World War II-era Marine barracks that once stood in the small, wooded valley, can choose to participate in the relocation. Also, three households across Old Fort Road from the subdivision may opt to participate.

The barracks were built in the 1940s by the federal government to house ill soldiers returning from the Pacific Theater. The site later became the first home of the school that became the Oregon Institute of Technology, which moved to its current location 1964.

The property has been privately owned since 1966. MBK bought it in 1977.

State and federal officials have been looking into asbestos-laden debris from the old barracks since receiving an anonymous tip in 2001.

While MBK has been involved in negotiations about how cleanup and study should be done at the site since 2002, the EPA, along with the Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies will be handling the relocation, said Dan Heister, EPA on-scene coordinator.

Although the EPA's Region 10 office, which covers the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, hasn't carried out a relocation of this size before, he said, an experienced Corps of Engineers official will help guide the process.

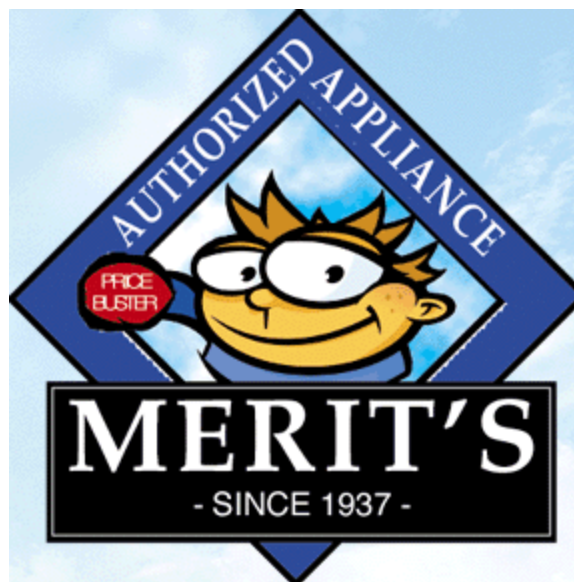
This summer's relocation is not mandatory. Smith said she expects about 20 of the 27 households to volunteer to move. The relocation could involve up to 54 adults, 10 children age 13 to 18, and 20 children younger than 13, according to the memo.

Now the EPA needs to start looking for rentals.

"We need to get a feel of the market and of what is available," Heister said.

Smith said there should be a public meeting about the relocation in about two weeks.

EPA officials said summer is the most dangerous time at North Ridge. North Ridge residents called for a temporary relocation during a March 16 public meeting, and have



repeated the request in personal discussions and letters.

"The hotter temperatures, dry weather, and strong winds typical in the summer in the Klamath basin will continue to aid in the migration of asbestos containing soils," according to the EPA memo. "As soils dry out they are more likely to be transported by wind, causing the asbestos to become airborne and available for inhalation."

Asbestos refers to a group of six naturally occurring minerals, according to the memo. Asbestos can cause asbestosis, cancer and respiratory ailments.

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