



Region 9: News Releases

Release date: 09/24/2007

U.S. EPA and Navajo Nation inspect 40 underground tanks on tribal lands

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SAN FRANCISCO -- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Navajo Nation Environmental Protection Agency recently inspected 40 underground fuel tank sites in an effort to increase compliance and prevent petroleum releases to the environment.

Between March and June of this year, the agencies together inspected fuel tanks located in areas of interest to the Navajo Tribe, issuing 20 field citations for a total combined penalty of \$8,200 for violations of underground storage tank regulations. The field citations were issued for operation, maintenance and record keeping violations.

“The EPA and the Navajo EPA are committed to enforcing underground tank regulations,” said Nancy Lindsay, the EPA’s acting Waste Management Division director for the Pacific Southwest region. “Leak prevention is essential in protecting the Navajo Nation’s precious ground water supplies. A hole the size of a pinhead in an underground storage tank can release 400 gallons of fuel in a year’s time, enough to foul millions of gallons of fresh water.”

“The Navajo Nation is conducting unannounced UST Compliance inspections to make sure facilities are in compliance with the Navajo Nation UST Act and Federal Regulations” said Stephen B. Etsitty, NNEPA Executive Director. “We require facilities to comply with the law, and to eliminate the risks of contaminating our groundwater resources, by using all our compliance and enforcement tools.”

The EPA and Navajo Nation EPA staff will continue to work closely with the owners and operators in receipt of field citations and formal orders to assist in their return to compliance. Both agencies plan to re-inspect in the coming year and expect to see an increase in compliance rates.

The Navajo Nation Underground Storage Tank Act was passed by the Navajo Nation Council on October 29, 1998. The Act requires the removal of all underground storage tanks that do not comply with the standards.

These inspections create a greater awareness of proper underground storage tank maintenance for owners and operators, with the goal of reducing hydrocarbon releases into the environment. The EPA and the NNEPA have seen improved operating conditions at storage tank sites as a result of joint inspections.

The 2005 Energy Policy Act increased inspections, required certification of underground storage tank operators, and added tank provisions, including additional piping and layers to prevent releases. Releases that are detected quickly can be cleaned up at far less expense than releases that go undetected for long periods of time.

For more information on EPA’s underground storage tank program, please visit:

<http://www.epa.gov/region09/waste/ust/index.htm>

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