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ADEQ Reaches Settlement with Asarco to Clean Up Contamination at Helvetia Mine Site near Tucson

PHOENIX (Oct. 3, 2008) – Arizona Department of Environmental Quality Director Steve Owens announced today that ADEQ has reached an agreement with Asarco LLC to have Asarco fund an investigation and clean up a contaminated former mining site south of Tucson as part of Asarco's bankruptcy settlement overseen by U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Texas.

The site, the former Helvetia copper mine, is 28 miles southeast of Tucson. Mining operations were conducted periodically at the site during the late 1890s and early 1900s.

"This agreement will help ensure that contamination from this old mining site will be cleaned up at last," Director Owens said.

Under the bankruptcy agreement, Asarco will pay up to \$880,000 into a special fund to pay for the cleanup, which will be performed by contractors hired and supervised by ADEQ.

Under direction from ADEQ, a complete remedial investigation of the site and nearby areas will be conducted to identify the extent of contamination. Waste piles at the site show evidence of acid mine drainage and erosion. Based on the results of the remedial investigation, the cleanup may include covering, or capping, the waste piles and planting vegetation to control erosion.

The Helvetia agreement is one of a series of clean-up agreements being negotiated between ADEQ and Asarco. In June the Bankruptcy Court approved an agreement for cleanup of Asarco's mining sites in Hayden in Pinal County and Winkelman in Gila County.