

Mining residue a threat to foothills town

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

In the Gold Rush-era foothills community of Jackson, the worst-case scenario painted by the Environmental Protection Agency last year about a 100-year-old dam there held a chilling warning.

In a scant two minutes, a breach at the Eastwood Multiple Arch Dam would send a 15-foot-deep mudflow with high levels of arsenic and other toxic chemicals downhill into the center of the historic community. On the way down, the mudflow would pass the entrance to Jackson Junior High School and nearby residences.

The weathered 100-year-old concrete dam is built on the former Argonaut mine roughly a mile north of the town and is so unstable that a big storm or an earthquake could lead to a breach, according to the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers. The result: millions of dollars of property damage and loss of life, with Jackson Creek and the city's sewage system contaminated.

The agency has also put the Argonaut mine on a shortlist of eight sites across the U.S. for possible listing as a Superfund project.

Read the whole story