

**JUMP THE FENCE PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS**

in association with **FILM SPROUT**

# TAR CREEK

**THE SUPERFUND SCREENING TOUR**

73 MINUTES

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## **SHORT SYNOPSIS** (145 WORDS)

TAR CREEK is the story of the worst environmental disaster you've never heard of: the Tar Creek Superfund site. Once one of the largest lead and zinc mines on the planet, Tar Creek is now home to more than 40 square miles of environmental devastation in northeastern Oklahoma: acid mine water in the creeks, stratospheric lead poisoning in the children, and sinkholes that melt the heartland right out from under American backyards and ball fields.

Now, nearly thirty years after being named among the first—and most costly—sites designated for federal cleanup by the EPA under its “Superfund” program, Tar Creek residents still fight for measurable cleanup, tangible environmental justice, and ultimately, the buyout and relocation of their homes to safer ground. As TAR CREEK reveals, America’s Superfund sites aren’t just environmental wastelands. Breeding grounds for distrust, poverty, and corruption, they’re community tragedies, too. Until the community fights back.

## **LONG SYNOPSIS** (275 WORDS)

TAR CREEK is the story of the worst environmental disaster you've never heard of: the Tar Creek Superfund site. Tucked away in the northeastern corner of Oklahoma, and sprawling across 40 square miles of abandoned lead and zinc mines, Tar Creek was among the first—and most costly—sites designated for federal cleanup by the EPA under its “Superfund” program.

But after decades of unwieldy and mismanaged remediation efforts, the people who live in the small towns and Quapaw Indian lands at the epicenter of the site remain unprotected from its toxins. In the town of Picher, stories-high piles of abandoned mine tailings—laced with heavy metals—abut school grounds and ball fields. Area creeks and wells, saturated with acid mine water, run red and green. Backyards gape open and cave in above unstable mine pillars. Perhaps least visible, generations of local children bear the developmental and emotional scars of long-term lead poisoning.

In TAR CREEK, we watch as Picher residents fight for measurable cleanup, tangible environmental justice, and ultimately, the buyout and relocation of their homes to safer ground. At the same time, we witness the threats posed by community in-fighting and the corruption of both local and state leadership. As TAR CREEK reveals, environmental cleanup requires much more than EPA science and funding. As surely as Picher needs stream restoration and chat removal, it needs consensus building and education: a united front of citizen stakeholders against the inertia of government bureaucracy and the twin burdens of poverty and distrust. If Tar Creek offers anything more than a legacy of ecological disaster, it's this lesson: America’s Superfund sites aren’t just environmental wastelands. They’re community tragedies, too. Until the community fights back.

## ABOUT THE SUPERFUND SCREENING TOUR

TAR CREEK is a story that must be seen beyond the borders of Oklahoma and used as more than a microphone for the particular issues faced in the devastated Tar Creek region. In a nationwide Superfund Screening Tour launching in August 2010, TAR CREEK can be used as a model for understanding the threats environmentally fragile communities face if citizens do not cooperate as outspoken and unified spokespersons for environmental and public health.

In dozens of community screenings and post-film discussions to be held with TAR CREEK across the country this fall, the film will serve as an unprecedented platform for environmental education and empowerment: a pragmatic lesson in how community solidarity and action can safeguard public and ecological health.

A powerful and convincing call to education and action, TAR CREEK has three messages for citizens, corporations, and government agencies struggling for environmental justice:

- Citizens have environmental and public health rights
- Citizens can hold federal, state, regional, and local authorities accountable for effective cleanup of and clear communication about Superfund sites
- Citizens can proactively insert themselves into the Superfund process by attending local public hearings, gaining access to public documents, and forming collaborative citizen advocacy groups

To host a screening of TAR CREEK as part of the Superfund Screening Tour, visit [www.tarcreekfilm.com](http://www.tarcreekfilm.com) for a hosting application, or contact Caitlin Boyle at Film Sprout, at 347.682.2483 or [tarcreek@filmsprout.org](mailto:tarcreek@filmsprout.org).

## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### **MATT MYERS, DIRECTOR**

Director Matt Myers grew up a few miles away from the Tar Creek Superfund site and used to play baseball in the shadows of the Picher, Oklahoma chat piles. When Picher residents worked toward the town's first community buy-out in December 2006, Matt knew his window to capture this story on film was closing. In 2007, he moved back home to his parents' home in Oklahoma and began filming three months later. A recipient of an MFA in Creative Writing from Colorado State University, *Tar Creek* is Matt's first film.

### **TANYA BEER, PRODUCER**

Producer Tanya Beer first saw the Tar Creek disaster while she worked for the Environmental Institute at Oklahoma State University in the summer of 1998. Tanya is married to Director Matt Myers (and daughter of Executive Producers Ron and Cara Beer), and she produced TAR CREEK

from the film's base camp in Denver while Matt was in the field. Currently serving as the Assistant Director for Evaluation & Strategic Learning for The Colorado Trust, Tanya holds a bachelor's English and communication studies from Drake University and a master's in public administration and international relations from Syracuse University.

#### **RON AND CARA BEER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS**

Oklahoma residents for 30 years, Executive Directors Ron and Cara Beer have spent their lives in education and as community activists. Ron served as Vice President for Student Affairs at Oklahoma State University for 20 years; Cara directed OSU's Volunteer Center and ecumenical campus organization. Ron and Cara volunteer at the Stillwater Habitat for Humanity and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and have done international volunteer work in Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Mexico. Their interest in environmental issues and the impact they have on local communities is of special importance to them; their work on *Tar Creek* is a natural extension of their environmentalism and commitment to community empowerment.

#### **ROBERT BILLINGS, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY**

Robert Billings graduated from the Brooks Institute of Photography in 1972 and has traveled the world as a cameraman and DP for the J. Paul Getty Museum, The Thomas Gilcrease Museum, and The Oprah Winfrey Show, among others. Billings' work has received a Cine Golden Eagle Award, First Place at the International Travel Film Festival, the Gold Medallion from the Broadcasters Promotion Association, and awards from Eastman Kodak Company and the Oklahoma Associated Press.

### **ABOUT FILM SPROUT**

Film Sprout works with independent filmmaker and local community leaders to launch national grassroots screening campaigns for films with a mission. Intended to bring broad viewership to issue-oriented films, these campaigns augment a film's public life while helping local organizations communicate their messages, educate their constituents, and effect social and environmental justice, one community at a time. Caitlin Boyle is the founder of Film Sprout and the architect of grassroots and community screening campaigns for numerous independent documentaries, including the award-winning features KING CORN (PBS, 2008), A SENSE OF WONDER (PBS, 2010), PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL (PBS, 2010), THE END OF THE LINE (Sundance Channel, 2010), and A SMALL ACT (HBO, 2010).

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

TAR CREEK was shot on HDV and is available in the US on DVD, Digibeta, and HDCam (NTSC). The film is 73 minutes.

To preview the film's trailer, or to obtain downloadable production stills, headshots, and poster artwork, please visit [www.tarcreekfilm.com](http://www.tarcreekfilm.com).

To book the film in a theater, to request a preview screener, or to host a community screening of the film as part of the Superfund Screening Tour, please contact:

Caitlin Boyle  
Film Sprout  
(347) 682-2483  
[tarcreek@filmsprout.org](mailto:tarcreek@filmsprout.org)

## FOR PRESS INQUIRIES

For a press screener of the film, or to receive stills, headshots, or poster artwork for publication, please contact:

Caitlin Boyle or Carla Fleisher  
Film Sprout  
(347) 682-2483  
[tarcreek@filmsprout.org](mailto:tarcreek@filmsprout.org)

To coordinate an interview with a member of the filmmaking team, please contact:

Matt Myers  
Jump the Fence Productions  
[tarcreek@gmail.com](mailto:tarcreek@gmail.com)  
816.504.4040

Website: [www.tarcreekfilm.com](http://www.tarcreekfilm.com)  
Trailer: [www.tarcreekfilm.com/trailer](http://www.tarcreekfilm.com/trailer)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/tarcreek](http://www.facebook.com/tarcreek)  
Twitter: [@tarcreek](https://twitter.com/tarcreek)

## THE TAR CREEK SUPERFUND SITE IN THE NEWS

"America's 10 Worst Man-Made Environmental Disasters", *Mother Nature Network* (June 14, 2010)  
<http://www.mnn.com/earth-matters/wilderness-resources/photos/americas-10-worst-man-made-environmental-disasters/picher->

"Tar Creek Buyouts Create Ghost Town", *The Oklahoman* (March 14, 2010)  
<http://newsok.com/tar-creek-buyouts-create-ghost-town/article/3446378>

"Final Graduation Set for Picher-Cardin Schools", *Associated Press* (April 24, 2009)

<http://newsok.com/final-graduation-set-for-picher-cardin-schools/article/3364098>

“Tar Creek Community to Close Down”, *Tulsa World* (April 17, 2010)

[http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=12&articleid=20090417\\_298\\_0\\_PCEhom946560](http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=12&articleid=20090417_298_0_PCEhom946560)

“The Tragedy Of Tar Creek”, *Time* (April 19, 2004)

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,612395-1,00.html#ixzz0r2YFVvXo>

“Despite Cleanup at Mine, Dust and Fear Linger”, *The New York Times* (April 12, 2004)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/12/us/despite-cleanup-at-mine-dust-and-fear-linger.html>

“Picher Journal: Waste from Old Mines Leave Piles of Problems”, *The New York Times*, (July 21, 2000)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/21/us/picher-journal-waste-from-old-mines-leaves-piles-of-problems.html?scp=14&sq=tar%20creek&st=cse>

“Three-Site Waste Site Called the Nation’s Worst”, *The New York Times* (November 14, 1981)

<http://www.nytimes.com/1981/11/14/us/around-the-nation-three-state-waste-site-called-nation-s-worst.html?scp=3&sq=tar%20creek&st=cse>

## TAR CREEK IN PICTURES

