

Tar Creek

95 minutes

This program includes close captions.

Time Code MM.SS.FF	Visuals	Transcript
00.00.00	<i>James Graves</i>	Will Rogers once said, somebody asked him about land, then he said, "Well, they just don't make much of it anymore." And we need...the Lord intends for us to be good stewards of what He gave us, and we did a terrible job here, we've did a terrible job.
00.16.08	TITLE CARD	from Jump the Fence Productions
00.22.29	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) Knew nothing about Picher. I'd, I'd spent half of a football game in Picher, Oklahoma back in 1984.
00.31.29	<i>Bob Walker</i>	It was dark; didn't have the opportunity to appreciate the scenic view that Picher offers with the, the chat piles, so I knew nothing really about Picher at all. It became obvious fairly quickly to me that, you know, we had a higher percentage of kids that demonstrated more difficulty in the classroom. Super kids, but they, they had, they struggled.
00.33.12	LOWER THIRD	Bob Walker PICHER-CARDIN SUPERINTENDENT
00.57.26	<i>John Sparkman</i>	We knew we had some problems with the, with the kids out there.
01.04.02	<i>Bob Hatfield</i>	Little Chad. I kind of hesitate to, to, you know, delve into it, talk that much about it, because... Well, he is our son and we want him to be as normal as, as anybody else's kids, you know. But he has problems.
01.05.00	LOWER THIRD	Bob Hatfield CARDIN RESIDENT
01.26.18	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) I said, "Well, you need to come down here and see what, what we've got," and I said, "It'll blow your mind." So they run up here and took a bunch of blood samples from these Quapaw Indian children.
01.39.20	<i>John Mott</i>	And, man, they found high lead counts. That's when it started, right there. When...But see, they wouldn't ever come in here and check the kids in Picher, the health department wouldn't, Oklahoma. But then they started checking and they found a monster.
01.41.05	LOWER THIRD	John Mott PICHER RESIDENT
01.55.14	TITLE CARD	Original Music By Watermelon Slim
02.00.08	TITLE CARD	Executive Producers Cara & Ron Beer
02.05.23	TITLE CARD	written and directed by MATT MYERS
02.09.20	TITLE CARD	TAR CREEK
02.17.02	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) And so we actually went door to door in the mining communities and knocked on doors and found out how many people had children six and under? And could we do

		lead testing on those children? And we tested a little over a hundred kids.
02.23.07	LOWER THIRD	NARRATED BY MATT MYERS
02.31.26	<i>Susan Waldron</i>	And found out that forty-three percent of those kids had elevated blood leads. So, the extent of that was really shocking.
02.35.21	LOWER THIRD	Susan Waldron OTTAWA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
02.40.06	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	And the EPA came and did a risk assessment—human health risk assessment—as well as, finally did a record of decision, and they felt like the primary risk, or the primary pathway, was through dirt. And some of the yards tested very high in terms of lead toxicity. When you think about where kids get lead, they're at, really at increased risk for a couple of reasons. One is a child absorbs more lead through the gut than an adult does, about fifty percent more. But with pediatric lead toxicity, it causes what we call developmental issues. It's only of importance between zero and six years of age, and it affects the developing neurologic [sic] system, mostly what we consider to be soft neurologic [sic] signs: school issues more than medical issues. So that's really the difference. The trouble is, you can't ever make that go away. Once it occurs, it's permanent.
02.41.41	LOWER THIRD	Mark Osborn MIAMI PHYSICIAN
03.32.20	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) How does a place get this bad? Some old cities are colored with lead paint yet you don't hear of levels this high. When you tell someone about lead poisoning like this, they need an explanation, but words don't quite do it. And with this much lead waste, forty-three percent feels like a success; it could have been a hundred. People don't realize that Tar Creek was declared a disaster a decade before they even discovered the lead poisoning. But they checked the kids ten years after the land had been condemned without thinking one might be connected to the other. Back then they thought if you fixed the soil that would fix the children. But you can't fix this land while the waste sits here. And you can't leave kids here while you take several decades to move all of it. Well I thought they couldn't.
04.22.26	<i>J R Matthews</i>	When they took ore, the rock, out of the ground, within that rock there are all the minerals they were looking for: lead, zinc, cadmium, everything else. And they would crush it, break it, smelt it to get the minerals out, to get the metals out. And then the little chips of rock that are left—we call it chat—well, it's tailings, it's the tailings from the mines, what's leftover from the stuff they didn't use.
04.23.08	LOWER THIRD	J R Matthews VICE-CHAIRMAN QUAPAW TRIBE
04.50.12	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) They're real inviting. You know I have to admit it myself, as an adult, when I first saw the chat piles, I just, I just couldn't imagine how it wouldn't be the funnest thing in the world to get up there and roll down them, slide down them, four-wheel down them, anything.
05.11.00	<i>Susan Waldron</i>	As a child, can you just image looking at something that looks like a gigantic sand pile and be told, "No, you can't go

		up there." I can't imagine that.
05.11.24	LOWER THIRD	Susan Waldron OTTAWA COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT
05.22.17	<i>James Graves</i>	We used to also play on 'em. In the winter time when the snow and ice is on, we used to go to a local salvage yard and get a car hood. And you never had a good time until you come [sic] off one of these chat piles with snow and ice with the, in a car hood, especially with two or three aboard.
05.28.29	LOWER THIRD	James Graves FMR. OTTAWA CO. COMMISSIONER
05.43.21	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	Picher and Cardin, that's where most of the risk would be, because you have so much metals on the surface still, surrounding the area. And, even if my yard's clean, if I'm a little kid, you'd be hard pressed to keep me from playing out in some of those areas at least, you know. I'd be off doing something.
05.44.15	LOWER THIRD	Scott Thompson DIRECTOR ODEQ LAND PROTECTION
06.02.25	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) I mean at one time, the Eagle Picher Mine itself was a quarter mile high. You could see it from downtown Main. Of Miami, Oklahoma.
06.12.19	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	You'd go away and you'd think, man there are some really big piles there, and you'd remember the biggest, hugest, four or five, six piles right there around Picher. But you keep driving around, you know, for miles and you forget, oh yeah, there's chat bases over here where piles used to be; oh yeah, there's mill ponds over here; oh yeah, there's piles the size of a house that I forget about or the size of an office building that you forget about because they're just dwarfed by the big ones. The volume here is hard to describe.
06.42.11	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	People don't realize how mined-out it is. The chat piles up there, they're humongous, but most of that has been hauled away.
06.43.10	LOWER THIRD	Pat Waddle MINER
06.55.23	<i>B-roll</i>	The problem with moving chat in that [sic] what's left behind is far more dangerous than what they take. What's left behind are the small fine materials, which are much more bioavailable, which means they can be absorbed easier by the stomach.
07.12.25	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	And secondly they're also much higher in lead content, about a thousand times higher in lead content than the gravel people associate with the word chat.
07.23.15	<i>B-roll</i>	Most of the chat piles you see out there are made of this course material, but then this other group, larger concentrations of metals are in this size of mine waste. Of course you can imagine that this stuff's not going to blow near as much as this stuff. So this, these fine particles get blown around and they have the highest concentrations of metals in them. If it gets deposited in a residential yard, children can ingest it. You know, it's just a lot more mobile. A long time ago, residents of Picher used to come out on Sunday and have picnics on the beach. They were actually having picnics on these, this, these fine tailings.
08.12.05	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) I had been doing some research about lead poisoning

		and the affects on lead poisoning and was looking through a tiny little publication that comes out.
08.23.02	<i>Rebecca Jim</i>	Had found that exposure to lead between the ages of seven and twenty-one led to extreme obesity in later life. And as a high school counselor dealing with young people with eating disorders and with youth that have trouble learning and people that sometimes don't make right social decisions, had a lot of dealings with those kind of kids. And one particular student stood out to me and I knew that she'd grown up in Quapaw, and she had a chat pile on her property. Her dad had built her a sandbox. And in that sand he'd taken not the gravel, but he'd taken the fines.
08.23.19	LOWER THIRD	Rebecca Jim DIRECTOR L.E.A.D AGENCY
09.03.13	<i>Bob Hatfield</i>	There's no doubt in my mind that somebody knew what lead could possibly do to your health. And they didn't tell nobody.
09.17.27	TITLE CARD	THE TRI-STATE MINING DISTRICT
09.21.21	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) With this much chat, the kids didn't hardly stand a chance. And I wish I could say that all the problems begin and end with chat piles and elevated blood leads or that there was only one problem to solve. But this chat is just a throw-away from one of the largest lead strikes on the planet. The Tri-State produced one third of all metals worldwide for over a decade. Every one of these problems was struck from the walls of these mines. Now we did need these metals during the world wars, so the government kept these mines humming. Remember that rock I was talking about? Yeah, this is where those ripples start.
09.59.14	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	My grandfather, he was the one that discovered the lead and zinc at Commerce, way back, oh, probably around nineteen and four. But they was drilling a water well on the southwest part of Commerce; Grandpa got a hold of them and told them to get back here, that he was on to something big.
09.59.29	LOWER THIRD	Pat Waddle MINER
10.23.16	<i>James Graves</i>	The Picher Field sprung up about 1912 and when the Picher Field got started, it was the wealthiest strike that they had had, yet.
10.32.25	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	They put me on a powdering job. The two powder monkeys: that's the guys that load the dynamite into the drill holes. The only time I was really scared was when I would hit that stick of dynamite and then machine men, the guys that drilled the holes, would turn that machine on and it was really loud when they turned that on. I mean you hit that dynamite and then they turn that machine on, you kind of flinch a little bit, you know.
11.05.09	<i>Hoppy Ray</i>	I started in summer of 1941. I was, I was sixteen. I went to service early in '43, and my ship got hit by a kamikaze in, early in '44 and I was discharged. And when I came back from the Navy I went to work in the ground with my dad over to old Dobson. It was kind of funny because he was, he was still pretty much of a hoss, he could shovel that dirt. So I went to shoveling over there. The lay-by was over here and

		they'd bring in a seven-can string of empties, and he'd get five of those while I was getting two, and I like to killed myself trying to catch up with him.
11.05.26	LOWER THIRD	Hoppy Ray MINER
11.51.25	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	I was a screen ape. Making little ones out of big ones with a sledgehammer. And that, that, is a job at times. Especially when they would go in there and shoot down the roof, when they shoot down the roof, it just brings a lot of rock down. Boulders as big as cars and things like that, you know. It grows on a person, to work in the mines. The temperature and, I like the smell. When we was [sic] kids, we played round the shafts in Commerce, you know, and we'd always go in them shafts and smell the shaft, that air coming out of them. I just, I just really can't describe it.
12.41.28	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	Everyone knows about the Trail of Tears of the Cherokee Nation. All thirty-nine tribes in Oklahoma have a Trail of Tears story. The Quapaws are no exception.
12.56.08	<i>J R Matthews</i>	The Quapaws are originally from the Mississippi Delta, the mouth of the Arkansas River, Mississippi River. All the way across southern Oklahoma was our original lands.
12.56.26	LOWER THIRD	J R Matthews VICE-CHAIRMAN QUAPAW TRIBE
13.05.19	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	They were discovered there in 1767 by the French, and at the time of discovery, it was estimated that the Quapaws could field seven to 8,000 warriors, which put the estimate of population at about 35,000 Quapaw. The major village was O-gah-pah. Today they call themselves O-gah-pah. Quapaw is a French perversion of O-gah-pah, and it just kind of fell that way. So here in 1767, a smallpox plague hits the tribe and begins to wipe them out and you can read it in the record, in the Congressional record. I've read it. It says the Quapaws are no longer the tribe they used to be. Quapaws do not have the right to occupy the whole southern half of Arkansas and we need to take and give them a reservation more fitting to their size. Then the Army began rounding them up. In 1833, they made a treaty with the remaining Quapaws to bring them to where they are today and they arrived here in 1835. And when they arrived to this area, there was only a hundred and thirty-five Quapaws remaining. Out of 35,000.
14.38.23	LOWER THIRD	John Berrey CHAIRMAN QUAPAW TRIBE
14.38.23	<i>John Berrey</i>	Back in 1830s, they sent us here from Arkansas and they drew a line on a map, and the only way we could be Quapaws was inside that line. So we can't go anywhere else.
15.02.05	LOWER THIRD	SPRING RIVER
15.02.05	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) So the Quapaws are coming up in wagons. You know, it's 1835. And they're dropped off, you know, this is your land. So they explore, you know, basically the east side of the Spring River, and it's exactly the kind of land they're used to. It's Ozark uplift. Looking, you know, across the river is those high bluffs. And that big bluff right across is called

		the Devil's Promenade. And the reason it's called the Devil's Promenade is because they got there...
15.47.28	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	...and they were working on how to get across, see the rest of their land, their new home, but the Devil was marching, parading up and down the top of that bluff. And everyone who tried to swim across drowned.
16.08.15	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) And so they couldn't cross the river because, you know, the Devil wouldn't let them cross.
16.17.20	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) The Quapaws were removed from their original lands and placed right here on a reservation inside Indian territory, seventy years before the ore was struck. Oklahoma wasn't even a state back then. Most of the ore was on Quapaw land so the mining companies leased tribal land and allotments to start this operation. A story about land is a story about landowners. And this story is as much Quapaw as it is American. And the Quapaw story changed forever once the miners sunk that first shaft.
16.54.10	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	They hit a huge vein that moved Northeast up through what's now Cardin and Picher, that became the Picher Field. That was the boom. And it was a huge rush, you know, of people into that area to start leasing Quapaw land. And you could buy, the Secretary of the Interior would allow, forty-acre leases. They stole land from the Quapaw tribe to create the town of, of Picher. Although there are still a lot of Indian leases within the town of Picher. But for the roads and the town itself and schools and that kind of thing, you know, they took, they just took the land.
17.27.12	LOWER THIRD	Earl Hatley FMR. ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR QUAPAW TRIBE
17.35.14	LOWER THIRD	Tim Kent ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR QUAPAW TRIBE
17.35.14	<i>Tim Kent</i>	This was the largest lead mining district in the world at one time. So all the munitions for World War I and a lot, most of them for World War II on the American side came from this area. So there was a huge incentive to keep the mining going, even at one time the government subsidized the mining to keep, because it was a strategic mineral.
17.59.13	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	The catch in the law was that if the Secretary of the Interior found any of the Indians to be incompetent, then the Secretary of the Interior would manage their leases.
18.14.28	<i>Tim Kent</i>	So the BIA was under a lot of pressure to have these tribal members sign mining leases. If you didn't lease to the mining companies, the BIA went to Congress and had individual tribal members declared incompetent.
18.29.10	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	It turns out that most of the incompetent Indians were the ones that had mines on their property and were a quarter blood or more. And the ones that were deemed competent were the ones that were quarter blood or less and didn't have mining leases, with rare exception.
18.52.07	<i>Tim Kent</i>	The government had a lot of hand in what went on out here.
19.00.02	TITLE CARD	THE WORST SUPERFUND SITE
19.07.13	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) Tar Creek is not a county or town or neighborhood. It's the country's worst environmental disaster, named after the

		creek that runs through it. It's forty-seven square miles of virgin prairie turned into permanent wasteland. They've thrown a mint of federal cash at Tar Creek, but you wouldn't know it. It's like Newton's Law: every action has an equal and opposite reaction. You punch a wall, that wall gets a hole or your hand gets broken. They just beat the hell out of this ground out here, and she came back swinging.
19.40.24	<i>John Sparkman</i>	And then of course we were declared a superfund site back in 1983 so we've been dealing with this for a long time.
19.46.29	LOWER THIRD	Tim Kent ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR QUAPAW TRIBE
19.46.29	<i>Tim Kent</i>	The reason they call it a "Superfund" is because Congress set aside a large amount of money, plus they taxed oil companies and chemical companies to put into this fund. And it grew to a pretty large amount of money, and they called it "The Superfund".
20.05.08	<i>Tim Kent</i>	It was established in the early eighties to deal with these huge Superfund sites around the country, these environmentally contaminated sites where the responsible parties either can't be located or are not claiming responsibility. So the government has to take over these sites and initiate the cleanup.
20.23.03	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	I remember hearing about being the worst superfund site in the country, and that was based on, EPA has a model they call the Hazard Ranking System model, HRS model, and they've changed it over the years, but at the time, the way that model was set up, this site scored very high. And of the 411 or some odd sites that were added to the National Priorities List, this was the top-scoring site.
20.30.04	LOWER THIRD	Scott Thompson DIRECTOR ODEQ LAND PROTECTION
20.45.03	<i>John Sparkman</i>	And once we were declared a Superfund site, that was the beginning of the end. Because you just don't bounce back from it.
20.45.03	LOWER THIRD	John Sparkman PICHER HOUSING AUTHORITY
20.55.15	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	The initial, primary focus was on water quality: what they call Operating Unit One. They came in, they tried to do some dyking, that kind of stuff, and it failed.
21.04.21	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	So, operable unit one was trying to solve the surface water impacts from the contaminated mine water being discharged.
21.12.26		<i>(Off Camera)</i> About how much was spent there?
21.14.13	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	About eight million dollars.
21.16.03	LOWER THIRD	\$8,000,000
21.16.03	<i>John Sparkman</i>	Their theory was water in equals water out. Doesn't work that way. Back during the mining, they had to pump twenty-four seven to get rid of all of the water that was in the Boone Aquifer, where the mines were located at. So you had tremendous amounts of water that, that you had to deal with, it just wasn't surface water causing this problem.
21.38.17	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	In the mid-nineties the focus became lead issues in children and it was kind of a national trend for the EPA; if they saw

		elevated lead levels they moved dirt, that's what they did.
21.49.19	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	We had an unusual situation here. That caused a new effort out here and that's when EPA designated the surface soils, in essence, in residential areas, Operable Unit Two. EPA hired the Corps of Engineers as their prime contractor to come in and do yard cleanups. It's pretty simple. You go out, you dig up some dirt out of the yard, you bring in new clean dirt. Take the top six inches where it's hot, where it's above the cleanup standard. If you have some below that in that spot, you take the next six inches, etc.
22.17.29	<i>Bob Hatfield</i>	They came in and they spent eighty thousand dollars to redo my yard. They dug out about three feet deep all around my four lots.
22.30.28		(Off Camera) What was the damage on that?
22.33.13	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	The best estimate I've gotten from EPA is a little a hundred and thirty million dollars.
22.37.22	LOWER THIRD	\$138,000,000
22.43.10	<i>John Sparkman</i>	The average cost to remediate a yard by the EPA was seventy thousand dollars per house.
22.51.03	TITLE CARD	OU 2 Yard Remediation
22.52.16	TITLE CARD	OU 2 Yard Remediation 1900 Homes Cost \$133,000,000 Aver. Cost per Home: \$70,000
22.56.09	TITLE CARD	OU 2 Yard Remediation 1900 Homes Cost \$133,000,000 Aver. Cost per Home: \$70,000 Average Cost of Area Housing: \$52,000
23.00.22	<i>John Sparkman</i>	In, I believe it was '95, I had some EPA officials come to my office and they told me what they wanted to do. I said, "Come go with me." So we all got in my pickup and I drove them up on a chat pile. And I said, "You folks think you're going to be able to fix this?" And one EPA official made the statement to me, on top of that chat pile right over there, "I'll be able to retire here." That's their attitude. It's not about what's best for these people. How can you justify digging up a yard when you have three million tons of contaminants across the street?
23.41.00	<i>Bob Nairn</i>	Could they have done things differently in the twenties during the mining boom? Could they have managed the waste differently? Yeah, probably. They could have done a better job of it. Were they thinking about it at that time? No. Should we think about it now? Damn straight, we better think about it.
23.42.17	LOWER THIRD	Bob Nairn, Ph.D. ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
23.57.12	TITLE CARD	Mean Water
24.01.00		(VO) Yeah, the chat's bad, the ground's bad, lead poisoning is high, but the reason the EPA came here on day one and called this their worst was the water. Since the mines closed, they've filled up with water so bad nothing can live in it and the water that pours out of the mines is no better.

		Back in their day, the Quapaws died trying to cross the river to get to their new home. This is some mean water out here.
24.26.15	<i>John Sparkman</i>	1979 was actually, from what I can remember, about the first time the EPA started sniffing around here so to speak. That's when the contaminated water started coming up out from the underground mines into the creek.
24.26.27	LOWER THIRD	John Sparkman PICHER HOUSING AUTHORITY
24.40.21	<i>Scott Thompson</i>	You had to pump the water out so you could keep the mine system dry then. So when you stop that, fills up, over time.
24.46.27	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	They were digging out an aquifer. That's why they had to continue pumping, and they suggested that if they ever had to stop pumping that within ten years the mine water would surface and kill all the fish in Tar Creek. That was ignored.
25.03.21	<i>John Frazier</i>	When the water is running, it's where most of the water comes out, is right here. There's so much water coming out here, it goes that a way full stream and goes out that a way, there's so much in here. But if I blocked this one off it'd come out somewhere else, in drill holes or something somewhere else. But this is actually an old shaft; mine workings right here. This fell in, so.
25.17.27	LOWER THIRD	John Frazier PICHER RESIDENT
25.32.29	LOWER THIRD	Tim Kent ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR QUAPAW TRIBE
25.32.29	<i>Tim Kent</i>	We're right at the 800-foot elevation level right here and a lot of the mine discharges are coming out right at the 800-foot level. And you can tell that when the red water mixes with the clear water, that's the difference. Although this looks clear, it's still got a lot of metals in it because it's discharging out of the chat piles. The sides of the mine that has the minerals in it are submerged beneath the water and it's isolated from oxygen. Oxygen is the key. You know, back when they were first filling up, there was a lot of oxygen available in the mines and that was causing oxidation of metals, which in turn, creates basically sulfur, sulfuric acid.
26.25.17	<i>John Sparkman</i>	You have Tar Creek, which starts up Kansas, runs through the mining belt, becomes contaminated at Douthat, which is just south of Picher. It then runs on the east side of Commerce, runs through the center of Miami, on into Neosho River, on into Grand Lake. Let's just say it's been doing that since '83. Nothing but orange, yucky, smelly, contaminated water.
26.55.18		(VO) This watershed has been clocking five million gallons a day since there have been clocks. And if water rolls into the mines or slides off a chat pile or flows out from the underground, it's real bad news. Once water gets touched by Tar Creek, it's done. Isaac Newton says the reaction to the mining is a lifetime of polluted water. And this mine system swallows any groundwater whole and then coughs up orange blood.
27.24.16	<i>Bob Nairn</i>	And you look at these problems and you say, "This has been here for a long time." It's not just twenty-five years

		since Superfund, it's since mining began. And we all benefited from that mining, either directly or indirectly. It was a good thing for the United States. But this is the legacy. We have kind of an obligation to fix it.
27.48.04	<i>B-roll</i>	If you drive through Picher right now and drive down Douthat Road, it...nothing's changed. Nothing has really changed since they put us on the NPL list. It's a disgrace. And it's sad. But no one has done anything about the water, the air.
28.19.23	<i>John Berrey</i>	But I'm ashamed right now of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Department of the Interior because they've spent all this time talking to us, telling us, you know, what they think we want to hear. But if you drive through Picher and you drive down Douthat Road, it looks the same as it did when they turned off the pumps and they walked away. No one cares about the people that live here.
28.23.02	LOWER THIRD	John Berrey CHAIRMAN QUAPAW TRIBE
28.43.00	TITLE CARD	BAD GROUND
28.47.00	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) This is not a safe place to live; it's a good place, there's good people here, but it's not fit. There have been whispers about buying this place out since it was named as a Superfund in '83. I mean, horrible water, all this mine waste, direct danger to children...But they couldn't get the help they needed. It should have been easier to put a buyout together. Whether it's a dioxin scare, or they want to build a lake or highway somewhere, buyouts happen all the time. And the human health dangers here seem to qualify. Plus, Tar Creek residents had an ace in the hole. Oklahoma's senior Senator, Jim Inhofe, was chair of the Environmental and Public Works Committee in the Senate. This committee oversees and directs the EPA and Inhofe oversaw the committee. As far as environmental buyout money goes, Inhofe was the faucet. When you have a place like this in your home state, and you're chairing the kind of committee that can actually help people, and you refuse, well, we could all smell what he was cooking. The problem was that Inhofe is a soldier of industry. Fact is, Inhofe's brother even used to work for the insurance agency owned by the mining companies. Inhofe is in deep with polluters, so he can't just order a buyout because that would prove this land's not fit for people. And if it's not fit, someone's got to pay for what got done. And that could get expensive. So they just pay Inhofe to make this buyout talk disappear. And these citizens have to stay. But to prove he was working for Ottawa County folks, he put together an eighteen-million-dollar cleanup plan to stand in for a buyout. Made everyone wait three years while he pulled it together. He was going to move all the chat. They ran the math on the plan the same day it was released. If you ran fifty trucks a day, all day, it would take forty years just to move the chat: forty years. Moving the chat will cost 225 million, not eighteen. A complete buyout was estimated at fifty million. And everyone knows Inhofe's not much of a science man.

30.43.05	<i>Senator Jim Inhofe</i>	Could it be that man-made global warming is the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people? I believe it is.
30.51.11	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) But it turned out he wasn't a math guy either. But then came news that not even Inhofe could spin.
31.00.28	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	If you got away from the mining, and didn't hear no noise or anything, that roof was always a popping and it's a settling. And I am surprised that Picher hasn't just all fell in.
31.02.14	LOWER THIRD	Pat Waddle MINER
31.20.22	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	The EPA came in, and they tend to divvy things up into units. Rather than looking at all the risk of an area, of a site, and saying this is our, this is what we think the end product should be, and we want to get there, they looked at water, and then they looked at lead, and then they, well the trouble is they forgot to look at subsidence risk, which is of course the undermining that goes along with hard-rock mining. You know, it turns out the area is significantly undermined, which really shouldn't be a surprise to anybody since they took out, I don't know, two hundred and fifty million tons of ore, maybe more.
31.41.14	<i>Tim Kent</i>	You know, this underground mining was done sometimes clear up to where they, till they, until they say tree roots. I mean you have a several-hundred-foot mine room that's going almost to the surface, guess what, it's going to collapse one of these days. And that land that you're seeing out there, it's all undermined. In Picher, in Cardin, where people are living, they could wake up one day and their house could be collapsed into a mine.
32.14.01	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	They didn't care what they done to the, the city, you know. Picher is just setting on pillars and...
32.21.20		(Off Camera) And they took those pillars down.
32.22.20	<i>Pat Waddle</i>	They, they took the pillars out.
32.24.13	<i>John Frazier</i>	Oh, medium size cave-in. Yeah, this is medium. This is a sunflower. Well, it's the biggest cave-in in the area, the Picher Field, right here. There's probably I'm going to say another 150-foot deeper than what the water is right now.
32.50.17	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	But I think there is a public policy issue here of if you can't account for all the risk in an environmental site you shouldn't be in charge.
32.58.19	<i>John Sparkman</i>	Well I've been around these my whole life and I'm still scared of them. I mean there's just, there's just no forgiveness if anything happens around these things. If you start going down, that's it, you're history.
33.15.03		(VO) It sounds crazy but those holes were actually a blessing. The state couldn't afford to move everyone out and Inhofe had already pounded his gavel that the current problems weren't bad enough. So things had to get worse to get anything done. Several areas collapsed that summer and Inhofe finally agreed to a study to prove the extent of the undermining. Not that it needed to be proven. Another study felt exhausting, you know, it felt tired to have to prove that the land was actually undermined and more holes were coming. But it was a material chance to get a buyout so nobody refused this two-million-dollar study.

33.53.20	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) You can't ignore the data or what the data shows in regards to the severity of the underground mining that was done up here. You cannot dispute it in any way.
34.10.15	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) As we were able to get political support to evaluate that risk, then it became obvious that people shouldn't live there.
34.19.14	<i>John Sparkman</i>	It's best for in the long run because don't have to worry about any more kids being raised in this environment. Yeah, we've got to put an end to that.
34.33.08	<i>Sonya Harris</i>	What we are doing is, we are going and finding comparables outside the project area and keep in mind the Superfund site is a bigger area than the project area. The project area is that area that I told you about, the forty-square-mile area that was in that subsidence team study. They're finding properties outside that area and then giving them comparable value for their property. The trust has tried to make some provisions to make sure that everybody gets a minimal, decent level of housing. So, in other words, if you live in a, in substandard housing we don't want to give you just enough money to go live in substandard housing in Miami or somewhere else. People get an appraisal and, and I don't care if you live in a 500-thousand-dollar house, you get an appraisal and you go, "Oh man, I really thought my house was worth more than that!", you know. And so what I keep telling people is, "Be realistic. In reality, if you took that house, in the condition that it's in, take it and stick it in Miami, Oklahoma, put a sign out in the front yard, how much do you really think you're going to get for that house?"
34.31.25	LOWER THIRD	Sonya Harris BUYOUT OPERATIONS MANAGER
34.37.03	LOWER THIRD	JUNE 2007
35.06.20	LOWER THIRD	PICHER, OK
35.26.23	LOWER THIRD	MIAMI, OK
35.30.24	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	Kind of interesting, we've, we've been so busy trying to do the appraisal issues and those kind of things to get people, I hope, what are very fair values, I mean that's our intent. Like with any appraisal, not everybody's happy with what they're appraised, but it's a chance for these people that they really never would have had otherwise.
35.37.02	LOWER THIRD	Mark Osborn VICE-CHAIRMAN BUYOUT TRUST
35.53.27	TITLE CARD	HARD LEAVING HOME
35.55.29	<i>Lahoma Deily</i>	I'd like to stay the rest of my life out here because I, I feel like I ain't got maybe a year, two years, you know, maybe not even that; it's up to God what years I got, but I hate to move, you know, I really do. Stuff on the walls and pictures, so much stuff and to, to have to get rid of it, different things, that's a lot of it. It'd be nice to have a nice house, you know, but I'm not able to take care of anything hardly now, you know, so.
36.02.04	LOWER THIRD	Lahoma Deily PICHER RESIDENT
36.31.25	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) Yeah, it ain't much, but it's home. And it's got to be hard leaving home, practically being made to leave. This

		place has already stolen their health, and their children's health. It squandered their property values, but it's still home. And once the buyout reaches critical mass, there won't be any more fire department, any more police, any more electricity or water or stores. It'll just be paved country, lined with rusted street signs. And when you go through all that and are told the one place you can't live is home, you deserve a buyout process that is dignified and clean. So the trust was appointed to represent the citizens during the buyout process. They carry out orders from the federal government, handle all the appraisal issues and cut checks from the homes.
37.11.11	LOWER THIRD	Citizens Buyout Trust
37.19.01	<i>Rose Ann Jones</i>	I'm just making a little short statement. I was offered fifteen dollars a square foot for my business and there's no way that you can build a mini storage business...I know it's not gigantic, it's just forty buildings. And, but it is nice. I'd like for all of you to go look at it. It's not a piece of crap.
37.24.13	LOWER THIRD	Rose Ann Jones PICHER RESIDENT
37.37.28	<i>John Frazier</i>	We're standing in front of my house and for the base package—the gun shop, the house, the land, three lots—eighty thousand dollars. There's no way you can go to Miami and replace this for eighty thousand dollars. It's impossible. I'd say a hundred and two thousand would be fair and I don't think I could actually go to Miami and replace it for a hundred and two. And I went to all of them to try to find out why and they said, "Well, that's just what we appraised it at." The appraisers have been in business for twenty-five years, they should know what they're doing. Well evidently they don't.
37.46.13	LOWER THIRD	Frazier Home \$80,000
38.03.05	LOWER THIRD	John Frazier PICHER RESIDENT
38.15.11	<i>John Sparkman</i>	The appraisal company, Cinnabar Services, out of Tulsa, is doing shoddy work. And the trust is paying them one-point-eight million dollars to do shoddy work. They're rude to the people, they have inconsistencies, and the trust will not hold them accountable.
38.19.24	LOWER THIRD	Annette Owens Cinnabar Service Company
38.26.05	LOWER THIRD	Bob Parmelee Cinnabar Service Company
38.34.14	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	Now listen, now wait a second, I, I, I listened, now why don't you guys listen. We, we have, people want to say this is not like the first buyout. Well, we did the same things: we put something out for bid, we hired a contractor, we have gone and, and gotten their appraisals and we've had them reviewed. I mean, and in all honestly, the values are higher in this buyout than they were in the first one.
38.34.14	LOWER THIRD	Mark Osborn VICE-CHAIRMAN BUYOUT TRUST
39.00.27	<i>John Sparkman</i>	And, and what do you see in, in the <i>News-Record</i> ? Here's today's <i>News-Record</i> . "Trust defends buyout approach".

		The trust is circling the wagons. You know? The trust is supposed to take care of these people and they're not doing it.
39.20.29	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	Are there going to be people who feel like they were due more? Yes. What I can assure you is there has been no conspiracy on the part of anyone to get higher values for certain people. Now, let me finish.
39.34.00		<i>(Off Camera)</i> I will.
39.35.20	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	What there is, is a lot of innuendo and accusation and yet there is no proof.
39.44.10		<i>(VO)</i> Ok we're coming up on Janelle's brother. This is Gaylan Hart, the gray house, just lap siding, a hundred-and-fifteen thousand. That house is old, old, old house. That's been moved three times. That house is probably at least eighty years old. Okay, this house on the left belongs to Missy and Sammy Beets. And they've been offered seventy thousand for the house.
39.53.14	LOWER THIRD	Hart's Home \$115,000
40.07.02	LOWER THIRD	Beets' Home \$70,000
40.11.12	LOWER THIRD	Sonya Harris BUYOUT OPERATIONS MANAGER
40.16.00	<i>Betty Cagle</i>	...not by appraisal standards.
40.16.21	LOWER THIRD	January 2008
40.16.21	<i>Missy Beets</i>	Oh my gosh.
40.17.00	<i>Sammy Beets</i>	Well what, hey.
40.18.00	<i>Sonya Harris</i>	Knock knock.
40.18.15	<i>Betty Cole</i>	Hi.
40.19.00	<i>Sonya Harris</i>	Hello.
40.20.00	<i>Sammy Beets</i>	...by appraisal standards last time we had it appraised? Yes, it was.
40.22.02	<i>Missy Beets</i>	Yes, it was a four bedroom.
40.24.25	<i>Betty Cagle</i>	Let me explain. Typically, in most homes, you have the bedrooms at one end of the home, the living area at the other. Next to the bedrooms is the bathroom. Rooms on the other side of the house away from the bathrooms, are usually not considered a bath, a bedroom because—this has to do with what we call functional issue—you don't want somebody walking through the living room in their underwear to go to the bathroom if there's going to be people in the living room. Therefore, this room typically would not be considered a bedroom.
40.27.02	LOWER THIRD	Betty Cagle REVIEW APPRAISER
40.55.10	<i>Sonya Harris</i>	And they don't, and they have a fireplace, that...
40.57.05	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	If there was a mistake with the Hart's property, there was a mistake. We cannot correct it...
40.59.07	LOWER THIRD	Mark Osborn VICE-CHAIRMAN BUYOUT TRUST
41.05.23	<i>Betty Cole</i>	And if that's the case then everybody in Picher and Cardin needs the same mistake made.
41.06.20	LOWER THIRD	Betty Cole PICHER RESIDENT
41.13.23	<i>Missy Beets</i>	Cinnabar, said, "There is something wrong with the Beets'

		appraisal.” So as you as a trust, why did you not help me?
41.14.12	LOWER THIRD	Trust Meeting March 2008
41.19.02	LOWER THIRD	Missy Beets PICHER RESIDENT
41.22.05	<i>Trust Member</i>	We did. We asked for your property to be re-reviewed.
41.25.00	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	We went over it.
41.25.12	<i>Missy Beets</i>	But you didn’t raise.
41.27.15	<i>Trust Member</i>	That doesn’t mean that we didn’t re-review it. Just because we didn’t order somebody to raise it or lower it.
41.32.00	<i>Missy Beets</i>	There’s something wrong with the Beets’ appraisal, so let’s leave it same and?
41.35.22	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	I don’t know what that statement means.
41.36.23	<i>Trust Member</i>	I don’t know what that means. We got three new comps for your property. It, and if they didn’t significantly change the value, then...
41.43.00	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	I mean, I promise you we went over that multiple times and...
41.47.25	<i>Missy Beets</i>	Mark, you can look at me and tell me you didn’t find anything wrong?
41.51.27	<i>Mark Osborn</i>	I thought you got a fair value for your home.
41.51.27	SUBTITLE	Mark: I thought you got a fair value for your home.
41.56.17	<i>Missy Beets</i>	Thank you.
42.00.15	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) The appraisers probably have it tough with this town. There are some poor people here. There are some bad looking homes and I’m sure those create some challenges. But you know, Missy and Sammy’s house is the same size as the Harts’. Missy and Sammy’s is much newer, and even if you’re blind and a little crazy and think these homes are in similar condition, and think a bedroom isn’t a bedroom if it’s not close to a bathroom, there’s still a forty-five thousand dollar difference in a town where the average home is fifty-eight grand. That’s almost the cost of a whole other house. This is kind of appraisal work the trust stands behind. And they sit in Missy’s home, on her couch, and say, “Maybe we gave the Harts too much, maybe we made a mistake.” And in the same breath they think Missy and Sammy got a good run.
42.09.10	LOWER THIRD	1440 sq ft, 4 bed/1 bath Built 1977 -- \$70,000
42.28.19	LOWER THIRD	1475 sq ft, 3 bed/2 bath Built 1950 -- \$115,000
42.45.00	<i>Betty Cole</i>	...forty-five thousand dollar difference!
42.28.03	<i>Bob Hatfield</i>	It’s not a Hollywood story, it’s...
42.50.10		(VO) And where does that leave those who’ve already worked a lifetime? Paid all their taxes in this town? Served on school boards and city councils? Organized parades and homecomings and Christmas caroling? They’re paid back with chapter eleven at ninety-two years old.
42.52.25	<i>Lahoma Deilly</i>	And then of course I know Kelly because she’s related to me. And outside of that, Jackie Bresee, she called me the other day, she’s so worried about moving. She’s alone, she ain’t got no neighbors; the one across the street’s all she’s got, and she don’t know about her house. They offered her twenty-two thousand on it, I think, she said, told me, so. I

		don't know what she's going to do.
43.24.11	TITLE CARD	Jackie Bresee \$22,000
43.24.11		(VO) They offered eighty-four-years-young Jackie Bresee twenty-two thousand dollars for her home. It doesn't matter what her home is like. Where can you move on that?
43.37.27	LOWER THIRD	a letter from Jackie Bresee to the Trust
43.37.27	<i>Sonya Harris</i>	She says, "Gentleman, the purpose of this letter is to explain why I do not have a bill of sale. When I was twenty-one I bought my home in Picher, Oklahoma in the fall of 1943 from Dewey Fields for three hundred-and-seventy-five dollars. I've lived here for almost sixty-three years. I'm now almost eighty-four years old and have lived in the neighborhood seventy-seven years, longer, as far as I know, than anyone now living or dead. It is with much regret that I will have to leave my home at this late time in my life, but I cannot stay without police protection, sewer service, utilities and safe neighbors. Please let me be among the last to go."
44.22.03	TITLE CARD	LLORA JACKIE BRESEE Oct 24, 1922 – July 24, 2008
44.26.00	<i>John Sparkman</i>	How do you expect an eighty-year-old women, who's lived in that house for sixty years, who's on a fixed income, how do you expect her to move out of the Superfund site on twenty-thousand dollars? Now, you know, it's easy for outsiders to come in and look at that house, say, "My gosh, that house isn't worth \$5,000." That's right, but that's that lady's home, that's all she has, and now you're going to take it away from her and now you've got to make her get into debt to get out of here. And the funny thing is, we can come in here and spend seventy thousand dollars to dig up her yard, but we can't give her enough money to move out of town on.
45.13.02	<i>Missy Beets</i>	1491, she, she lives up on the hill, across from Reeves...
45.15.29	<i>Betty Cagle</i>	And she got how much?
45.17.09	<i>Missy Beets</i>	A hundred and fifteen thousand. Hurd.
45.18.23		(VO) This is what environmental problems look like. They look like people problems. Environmental problems are people problems. As long as gravity still holds us here, they aren't separate.
45.31.00	<i>Trust Member</i>	Have you accepted your offer?
45.32.00	<i>Unnamed Woman</i>	I haven't been offered anything.
45.33.25	<i>Trust Member</i>	She was on that, she was on the agenda.
45.34.25		(VO) And these folks have been stolen from, their land raped, their names drug through the mud, but they are tough as hell. Break everything else you can grip, but these people ain't breaking on your science, on your say-so, or on your legislation of the month. Hell yes they get red-headed and mouthy when things seem counterfeit. What else do you have when there ain't much? Just your word, your soul, and your back. One hundred years later they're still here, still fighting for their health and their cool spot of dirt. Whether it's fair or whether it ain't, they are going. This will not be home anymore. And a hundred years after the first pickaxe struck Oklahoma gold, they're handing this place back to the Quapaw. Appreciate the ore, here's the worst Superfund site in the country.

46.27.06	TITLE CARD	THE LAND'S FATE
46.30.03	<i>John Berrey</i>	Tar Creek, it hasn't even started yet. You know, just because the buyout's going on doesn't mean it's over. It means it's just beginning.
46.34.22	LOWER THIRD	John Berrey CHAIRMAN QUAPAW TRIBE
46.40.08	<i>Tim Kent</i>	And they can buy these people out, which is what they're going to do, but the tribe's going to be here forever because the government's not going to give them any more land. You can see that with all this mine waste covering the landscape, it's really not usable.
46.41.11	LOWER THIRD	Tim Kent ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR QUAPAW TRIBE
46.56.10	<i>Earl Hatley</i>	In the sixties, Eagle Picher was pressing for, to get out of their leases, you know, and to move. And they also offered to put the chat back in mines and the Department of the Interior denied that, stating that the Quapaw lands were no longer any good for anything. They were ruined for agriculture or any other purpose. That the only economic derivative left of, of their lands was the gravel on the surface. And that they could sell that gravel.
46.58.17	LOWER THIRD	Earl Hatley FMR. ENVIRONMENTAL DIRECTOR QUAPAW TRIBE
47.32.26	<i>Tim Kent</i>	When they started realizing that chat had heavy metals in it and was environmentally hazardous, the Department of the Interior realized that that's a liability. Since they managed the asset for the tribe, if they allow that to be sold, then they would incur a liability. Because if this chat were sold and put somewhere else that place might become a Superfund site.
47.57.07	<i>B-roll</i>	(VO) They're lucky there is so little left today. There's no telling what the epidemic would look like if there were five times as much lead poisoning their young, polluting the creeks, and making the ground tremble. But eighty years later there sits seventy-five million tons. Eighty years of kids passing through, struggling in school. Here or gone, this chat didn't just hurt the kids who tested high. Lead was here in mountains before anyone was running tests.
48.28.18	<i>Tim Kent</i>	So, not only is the chat left on the Indian lease, where the tribal member can't use the land. Then they found out they couldn't sell it either, so their land became useless. As result, this chat's been just sitting here for eighty, ninety, a hundred years.
48.45.18	<i>J R Matthews</i>	You know, we're being restricted from our sales, but the non-Indians are not.
48.51.19		(VO) This chat causes lead poisoning. That's not an opinion. It ruins this very land that was given to the Quapaw to replace what they gave up. And the BIA made sure this chat stayed right here. The BIA said, "These are the people who are going to bleed because of this waste." And what is now so clear about this function is that damaging the land is not a separate act from damaging a culture.
49.22.07	<i>Tim Kent</i>	The whole reason that the government gave the tribe this

