

# Emery County **Progress**

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## Sink hole appears in desert



A large sink hole in the San Rafael will need to be filled soon.

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Staff writer

Mark Mesch of SRA International, a government contracting company, addressed the Emery County Public Lands Council concerning a new campaign called FAST. FAST is for fix a shaft today. The purpose of this partnership initiative is to eradicate unsafe abandoned mine land features as quickly as possible without the delays normally associated with actions taken on public and private lands. Nearly 30 people die each year in accidents involving mine land features, most of those are on public and private lands in the southwest United States.

A very dangerous sink hole, about 30 feet in diameter and at least 25 feet deep was discovered on the San Rafael very recently, in the past week. It was determined to be an old mine shaft which water had gotten into and now has caved in creating a hazardous hole to the surface. A group of off highway vehicle riders found the hole and notified the Bureau of Land Management, who controls most of the land in the San Rafael.

Mesch explained there are Utah state and BLM entities which deal with mine reclamation issues. These groups deal with large mine sites or large numbers of mines. For the occasional mine feature that pops up, these groups are not prepared to handle the dangerous situation in a timely manner. The BLM learned of the FAST program and its effectiveness in other states, such as Nevada. They have modeled their program after that successful one. It is their goal to make a FAST program a working program in every state in the western United States and is the reason they have contracted with Mesch's company to get the information out to the public.

The FAST initiative aims to create a simple approach for public land users to report safety hazards and identify hazards posing risks to recreational users. It will attempt to make public and surrounding private lands safe for responsible users by eliminating abandoned mine shafts and other features.

As for the recently discovered open mine shaft on the San Rafael, the BLM has fenced the area to prevent anyone from getting close. Until the time when the hole can be filled in, the FAST initiative will be instituted and the proper partners will work together to remedy the problem. This issue will help all partners work through the process and work out the kinks.

"We are in the process of figuring out funding so no one person or agency is saddled with the total cost of taking care of these pop-up problems," said Mesch. "This is a great opportunity to provide solutions to solve the problems with mine features, not only in Emery County, but in the State of Utah as well. In Utah this process is just beginning and it is working well in Nevada."

Ray Petersen, Emery County Public Lands Administrator informed the lands council this newly discovered, dangerous mine shaft is not an isolated occurrence in the San Rafael. "This is not the only one," he said. "It would be a nasty place to end up on a motorcycle or 4-wheeler. Emery County has already been participating by filling in some hazards with the BLMs permission and approval."

Several goals of the FAST program are: to develop partnerships which result in the donation of time, labor and use related to mining equipment to aid in closing dangerous mine shafts and structures; to encourage knowledge sharing and technology transfer among government and stakeholder groups; and to solicit technical volunteers from wildlife agencies, academia, bat enthusiasts, and amateur archaeologists to assist with NEPA clearances. By attaining these goals, the process to remedy a dangerous situation will go more smoothly and very quickly, thus possibly saving lives.

Mesch concluded by stating, "We are going to address isolated mine features that pop-up, those that can be addressed quickly. We need OHV users, geocachers, and other area users to participate in this also. They are the eyes in the field. If a user discovers a mine feature, they should take a picture and a GPS reading if possible, and notify the regional office of the BLM as soon as possible."

Emery County Commissioner Gary Kofford asked Mesch if Emery County's participation in this program will encumber Emery County with future responsibility of the sites dealt with. Mesch assured Commissioner Kofford that is would not make Emery County liable for any of the rehabilitated sites. Commissioner Kofford stated he would support this initiative if: 1) the work would be done by private industry first; 2) no future liability would be placed on Emery County; and 3) the county would be reimbursed for any work they may be required to do.

The public lands council approved unanimously to support this initiative on the same conditions outlined by Commissioner Kofford. They will make that recommendation at the next regularly scheduled commission meeting.

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