

GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM  
IN THE TAR CREEK BASIN:  
THE CASE OF PICHER,  
OKLAHOMA

By

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## PREFACE

This study is an examination of a rural community's struggle to deal with environmental issues. Continued environmental problems in Picher, Oklahoma have divided neighbors and split the entire community into two factions. I have gained a better understanding of environmental conflicts, community dynamics, and grassroots organizing through this project.

I sincerely want to thank Drs. Jean Van Delinder and Gary Webb for their input into the project. I am especially grateful to my friend and advisor Dr. Thomas E. Shriver, who continually encouraged me toward this end project.

I am also indebted to my wife Marville for putting up with the periods of neglect during my isolation so I could complete this project. Had I searched another lifetime, I could not have found a better partner.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Picher, Oklahoma is located in the northeastern corner of the state, near the Kansas and Missouri borders. The town is easy to locate because of the large piles of mining waste, or “chat,” that have been left scattered over a forty square mile area surrounding Picher. The chat piles are the residual waste from the lead and zinc mining operations that took place in the area during an eighty year period, from the mid 1890’s to the mid 1970’s. From a distance the piles look like barren hills surrounding the town, but upon closer examination it becomes evident that the chat piles are literally in the residents’ backyards. One of the largest chat piles in town sits just outside the local schoolyard. Near the chat piles there are floatation ponds, which are bodies of water saturated with lead residue covering more than 800 acres.

As a result of the mining operations in and around Picher, large mineshafts have been left open. The mining companies dewatered these mineshafts until mining operations ceased. As mineshafts began to fill with water, the native minerals began to oxidize, dissolve, and create acid mine water. After filling with water these open mine shafts then allowed heavy metals to contaminate ground and surface water. Acid mine drainage began to discharge into Tar Creek in 1979 from natural springs, boreholes, and open mine shafts. The entire forty square mile area is undermined and some of the mineshafts located under the town occasionally cave in creating dangerous sinkholes.

Above ground, lead contaminated residential soils and the chat piles are a source of dangerous lead exposure to the population. Chat piles are contaminated with lead dust and other heavy metal residues that continue to spread throughout the area. As a result of exposure to the lead in these chat piles, Picher residents have blood lead levels that are much higher than national averages in spite of efforts to educate the public about the importance of cleanliness and hygiene practices. High blood lead levels are particularly acute for children living in the area (Walton 2002). The Environmental Protection Agency has determined that high blood lead levels contribute to learning disabilities. Young children are at the highest risk because they play in the contaminated yards. Despite continued efforts to remediate the area, Picher remains one of the most contaminated sites in the country (Walton 2002).

Because of these environmental problems, Picher has been designated as the Environmental Protection Agency's number one Superfund site. The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as Superfund, was enacted by Congress on December 11, 1980. This law created a tax on the chemical and petroleum industries and provided federal authority to respond directly to releases or prospective releases of hazardous substances that could endanger public health or the environment. To date, nearly one hundred million dollars has been spent to clean up the area around Picher and very little has been accomplished. Some of the chat piles have been removed, but there are many more that remain. Until recently, the citizens of Picher have relied on the government to remediate the area.

As a result of the continued contamination, Picher residents have begun to voice

their concerns in the community, and have organized their efforts in response to the environmental pollution in their town. However, local residents do not agree on a solution to the problems. Some residents have organized to mobilize a federal buyout. Others want to remain in Picher. In this study I will explore both sides of this debate, and examine grassroots activism and the environmental controversy in America's number one Environmental Protection Agency Superfund site.

In the following section, I discuss literature relevant to this project and outline the conceptual framework utilized throughout the course of this study. I also discuss the methods that were used to complete the project.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

In this section I outline the theoretical issues addressed in this study. The study focuses on competing grassroots environmental organizations in Picher. Grassroots organizations develop when local frustrations affect a growing number of people and the discontent mushrooms into a movement (Turner and Killian 1972). Grassroots environmental organizations mobilize to focus specifically on environmental problems at the local or grassroots level. That is, ordinary, everyday people with relatively little political power become concerned with some environmental threat to their community (Cable and Cable 1995).

Grassroots environmental organizations emerged in the late 1970's in response to the growing awareness of contaminated communities (Cable and Cable 1995). Our understanding of grassroots environmental organizations is grounded in contemporary social movement theory. In the following sections I will outline some important theoretical traditions in social movement theory. I then discuss how these conceptual issues are used to guide my research on grassroots environmental activity in Picher, Oklahoma.

#### **Early Social Movement Theory**

The study of social movements emerged out of the collective behavior tradition.



Some of the earliest work involving collective behavior and social movements was developed by scholars such as Gustave LeBon (1882 [1895]), who was primarily interested in mobs and mob behavior in late nineteenth century France. LeBon based his work, *The Crowd*, on observations he made in Paris during 1871. In this work, LeBon described all collective behavior as “irrational.” He believed that when the “mind of the crowd” took over, people acted destructively under the influence of instincts which are ordinarily inhibited (cited in Turner and Killian 1987:5). In addition to LeBon’s work in France, Scipio Sighele and Pasquale Rossi in Italy, and Sigmund Freud in Vienna also referred to collective or crowd psychology as irrational and abnormal (MacKay 1932).

The study of collective behavior garnered attention in America by way of the Chicago School, primarily through the work of Robert Park. Park was influenced by LeBon’s work and incorporated his ideas relating to crowd contagion in his 1904 dissertation, *The Crowd and the Public*. Park argued that the crowd was uniform and, acted on impulse and irrationality. In contrast, he also saw the public as being capable of rational action.

Throughout the early work in collective behavior, irrationality emerged as a common theme in research. Early analysts and scholars often referred to the behavior related to fads, mobs, riots, and revolutionaries as acts based on “aroused impulse” (Blumer 1951:171). Blumer, a student of Robert Park, theorized that these irrational acts were, for all practical purposes, spontaneous acts carried out by individuals with no particular cultural or societal ties or bonds (Blumer 1951). He agreed that actors were acting beyond the boundaries of recognized values or norms and believed that the field of

collective behavior was a study of emergent social order.

As collective behavior theory evolved, analysts moved away from emphasis on the “irrational” nature of social movement activities. Instead, they began to focus on “spontaneity” and the “emergent nature” of social movement activities. For example, Smelser (1962) referred to the fickleness and spontaneity of collective behavior. Yet, analysts a decade later began to note that the “emergent approach reflects that a crowd is characterized not by unanimity but by differential expression” characterizing a shift in collective behavior ideology that had been dominant for over half a century (Turner and Killian 1972:22).

By the late 1960’s, there was a definite shift in the study of social movements. According to Buechler and Cylke (1997:59), “By the 1970’s, many sociologists had become dissatisfied with traditional approaches to social movements and with collective behavior theory in particular.” The Civil Rights movement of the sixties led many scholars to question the utility of collective behavior theory for understanding political social movements. Concerned with the lack of information illustrating why some collective gatherings were neither mob in nature nor spontaneous, sociologists began to build new theoretical concepts concerning the mobilization of groups through periods of contentious consensus (Rose 1982).

An abundance of empirical evidence began to surface during the sixties that suggested protest groups were fueled by political goals. This new evidence indicated that groups or collectivities had begun to form around specific political agendas. These new collectives wanted to address established political power and bring about change. An

abundance of sociological literature indicates that by the late 1960's many more scholars were criticizing the traditional collective behavior theories for their approach to political social movements (Rose 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Taylor 1989). As a result of these criticisms, new theoretical frameworks began to emerge to address the widespread social movement activity of the period.

### Contemporary Social Movement Theory

#### Resource Mobilization

The major theoretical framework to emerge in the study of social movements in the 1970's was resource mobilization theory. This new set of theoretical issues was a direct reaction to perceived inadequacies associated with earlier classical or traditional social movement theory. Resource mobilization shifted the analytic focus and revitalized and stimulated interest in the field of social movements (McAdam 1982). The focus on rational choices, organizations, and macro social structures stimulated new research from networks to tactical innovation (Benford 1993).

Prior to resource mobilization, social movement theory was associated with strain or deprivation (Turner and Killian 1987). Earlier classical approaches to social movements assume a degree of strain or deprivation in the genesis of a social movement (McAdam 1982). Those approaches focused on the psychological impact that strain has on individuals while downplaying political motives. They also emphasized the importance of social movement participation in dealing with the tensions of various strains (McAdam 1982). Analysts argue that social movement participation must be examined with the

assumption that strain and deprivation are always present (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Thus, according to resource mobilization, strain and deprivation are not the predictors of social movement emergence (Zald and McCarthy 1987). Resource mobilization theory is more closely associated with political sociology and organization theory than with the social psychology of collective behavior (Zald and McCarthy 1987). Resource mobilization theory is concerned with the processes by which social movement groups attempt to mobilize sufficient political resources to bargain successfully with established polity members (McAdam 1982).

The emergence and increasing prominence of resource mobilization in the 1970's and 1980's was in direct response to the political protests initiated in the 1960's and 1970's (Buechler 1993). A number of analysts recognized and identified the goals of various movements, including the Civil Rights, Women's, peace, and environmental movements and were not satisfied with the limitations of existing theories. According to (Benford 1993:197) "That many movement scholars were themselves participants in the student, civil rights, women's and anti-Vietnam war movements no doubt facilitated this reconceptualization."

Resource mobilization analysts argue that the success of social movements are based, in part, on the ability of capable leadership who know how to organize, mobilize, and channel the deprivation and dissatisfaction that is so prevalent in society (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Zald and McCarthy 1987; Gamson 1990). Furthermore, these analysts place central importance on the effective utilization of existing resources as a key element of mobilization. Resource mobilization focuses on changes in various structures such as

social networks (Snow et al. 1980), organizational strength (McAdam 1982), the structure of political opportunities (Eisinger 1973; Jenkins and Parrow 1977), and resource pools (McCarthy and Zald 1977) as mechanisms that affect social movements. Resource mobilization also deals in general terms with the dynamics and tactics of social movement growth, decline, and change (Zald and McCarthy 1987).

Resource mobilization defines resources in broad terms including money, labor, degree of organization, involvement from outside the collectivity, and consideration of costs and rewards involved for individuals and organizations (Zald and McCarthy 1987). Realistically, anything that can be converted to a social movement organization's advantage can be considered a resource such as time, money, networking, constituency and leadership. The emphasis on resources and organization reflects the fact that prior planning is being examined in social movements.

Despite the popularity of resource mobilization and the contributions made to the field of social movements, critics have identified several limitations. As indicated, early theories of social movements assumed there was a close link between the frustrations, or grievances, of a collectivity and the growth and decline of movement activity (Zald and McCarthy 1987). Resource mobilization theorists neglected the fact that grievances are subject to varying interpretations and could differ across time (Snow et al. 1986). Resource mobilization has also come under attack by some Feminist scholars who criticize the theory's neglect of grievances and its narrow conception of rationality as "being patriarchal" (Benford 1993:198).

Buechler (1993:220) identifies a number of areas that "pose some degree of

challenge to resource mobilization's framework for studying social movements" such as culture, thereby overlooking some of the core values of a movement (Buechler 1993). Buechler also notes that resource mobilization, by focusing on organization and leadership, ignores other important levels of analysis. Finally, resource mobilization has been criticized for ignoring the processes that contribute to the initial need for collective action. Thus, it ignores the processes that shape how collectives decide to participate in social movement activity (Klandermans 1992).

#### The Political Process Model

A second major theoretical perspective to emerge in the past two decades is the political process model, commonly referred to as the political opportunity framework. Political opportunity attempts to integrate meso-, macro-, and micro-structural approaches in challenging institutionalized power structures. The political process model (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978) makes political opportunity a central factor in protest emergence. McAdam (1982:36) stresses that "political opportunity is based on the particular conception that wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of a few, thus depriving most people of any real influence over decisions that affect their lives." In this framework, social movements are shaped by the political opportunities or constraints afforded them by the national context in which they are embedded (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).

Rather than concentrating solely on the internal factors involved in a movement, political opportunity describes insurgency as a product of both internal and external factors. Thus, analysts emphasize the importance of the larger political environment

(McAdam 1982). Political opportunities translate the potential for movement into mobilization. Groups with mild grievances and few internal resources may appear in movement, while those with deep grievances and dense resources, but lacking opportunities, may not (Tarrow 1994).

Melucci argues that movements are social organizations and they confront political systems when they choose public mobilization (Melucci 1985). The importance of the political process to social movements is that the processes ultimately depend upon social protest to bring about shifts in existing power relationships (McAdam 1982). Yet, action alone does not necessarily bring about a desired outcome: an opportunity for change is also required (Burstein, Einwohner, and Hollander 1995; Jenkins and Parrow 1977).

Tarrow (1994:18) illustrates how political opportunity shapes protest:

How these aspects of political opportunity structure affect the mobilization of a movement could be seen in the march on Washington in April 1993. An electoral realignment had just occurred: from a Republican government favoring the religious right and the muscular military to a new Democratic president. The latter in an early campaign promise had promised to end the ban on gay men and lesbians in the military. There was an evident split within the political elite on the broad issue of "family values" which gave the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force the opportunity to gain policy advantage. And it found influential allies in the women's movement, among civil rights groups and even in Congress. Politics opened the gates of opportunity.

In the analysis of political social movements, four distinct catalyzing agents can be distinguished (Oberschall 1996): (1) dissatisfaction and grievances; (2) ideas and beliefs about justice and injustice or right and wrong; (3) mobilization capacity of a challenger; and (4) political opportunity. Although any single factor can be a catalyst for creating social movement activity, the likelihood of such activity is enhanced when a combination of such factors exists (Oberschall 1996). Although movement participants may feel they

have been deprived of something at some level in society, or believe that some injustice is prevalent in their lives, political opportunity is more closely related to the incentives it provides to prospective movement members (Tarrow 1994).

As political opportunity theory has gained wider acceptance, it has also encountered limitations and weaknesses. Analysts note that the political opportunity approach is biased toward social movements in developed democracies. According to Schock, (1999:356) “We lack systematic applications of political opportunities to challenges outside democracies.” Schock also notes that selection bias may be a problem with the political opportunity approach. He notes that studies utilizing political opportunities as a basis for their explanations are usually limited to case studies of single, successful movements.

Analysts also note problems with the way opportunity has been defined (see Einwohner 1999). According to McAdam (1996:25) “Scholars have defined or interpreted the term (political opportunity) differently in an array of broad based situations to the point of rendering the term as being nearly useless.” The definition of opportunity is vague and the broad applicability of the concept adds to the difficulty identifying all opportunities that exist in any protest or movement (Einwohner 1999).

### Framing and Social Construction

In recent years, social movement theory has moved towards a more social constructionist orientation. The constructionist perspective is derived from Berger and Luckman’s (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality*. Ironically, along with the



introduction of this work there has been a return to some of the early concepts attributed to collective behavior (e.g. importance of grievances, identity) and a return to the social psychological roots of social movement theory. One of the most important contributions within this context is the framing perspective.

Snow, et al. (1986), first popularized the use of framing in the social movement literature with their article on frame alignment processes. According to Snow and Benford (1992:134), “a frame simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action within one’s present or past environment.” The earliest work on “frames” was developed by Erving Goffman (1974:21), to illustrate the ability of individuals to “locate, perceive, identify, and label” phenomena that occur in and around various and specific individual life situations. A frame is a presentation of a socially constructed idea in an acceptable form (Goffman 1974). According to Goffman (1974:21), a frame “refers to an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the world out there by allowing us to encode objects, situations, events, experiences and sequences of action.”

Framing concepts have played a central role in revitalizing and redefining a social psychology of collective action (Snow et al. 1986; Snow and Benford 1992). Framing has provided movement analysts with a new lens through which to examine a wide variety of movement issues and activities. This is due, in part, because framing allows scholars aligned with earlier resource mobilization and political process perspectives to bring culture back in to their analysis (Haydu 1999).

Snow et al. (1986) identified four processes associated with frame alignment.

Those processes are frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation. Through these four alignment processes, individuals or collectives are able to present ideas that are easily identifiable by others in an effort to gain confidence and support. According to Snow and Benford (1988:198), movements are “actively engaged in the production of meaning for participants, antagonists, and observers.” Movement leaders *frame*, or assign meaning to and interpret those relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists (Snow and Benford 1988). Snow and Benford’s use of framing exemplifies purposeful and strategic efforts by prospective and actual movement leaders to manufacture meaning in positive ways that enable the recruitment and maintenance of coalition members (McAdam 1994).

One way mobilization and recruitment is accomplished is through the use of collective action frames. Snow and Benford (1992:137) define collective action frames as “emergent action-oriented sets of beliefs and meaning that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns.” Collective action frame analysis reflects attempts to bring social psychological factors back into the analysis of social movements and views participants engaged in the constructions of their own mobilizing beliefs as rational actors (Noonan 1995). Collective action frames perform three functions (Snow and Benford 1988; 1992; Benford 1993). First, collective action frames act as diagnostic framing tools that note and expound a serious and/or unjust social condition (Snow and Benford 1988). Second, prognostic framing identifies a solution to the diagnosed problem and includes strategies for action (Snow and Benford 1988; 1992). Third, motivational framing is a call

to action and a stated or published rationale for individuals to engage in some form of remediating action (Benford 1993). Defined as such, collective action frames allow activists and other interested collective participants to create meaning out of ambiguous situations.

Activists employ collective action frames to punctuate or single out some existing social condition or aspect of life that is deserving of a corrective action (Benford 1993; Krogman 1999). The use of collective action frames allows concerned individuals to identify and point out a problem, and focus on some pertinent action by which to overcome the problem. Simply identifying that a problem exists and placing the call for action does not necessarily ensure collective action. The ability to point to the direct cause of the problem and place blame for the problem on some entity aids in ensuring adherence to a call to collective action (Snow and Benford 1992).

Social constructionist perspectives have become popular in the study of environmental issues (Shriver, White, and Kebede 1998; Krogman 1999; Shriver 2001). Analysts examine the ways in which aggrieved populations define environmental problems and issues. Importantly, the construction of meaning through framing practices plays an important role in grassroots activists' efforts to mobilize support and launch claims against the polluters, and the institutional powers that support them (Capek 1993; Cable, Shriver and Hastings 1999).

#### Competing Frames: A Theoretical Framework for Picher, Oklahoma

For this study of grassroots activism, I draw from social movement literature on

social construction/framing, resource mobilization and political opportunity to examine the organizing efforts in Picher, Oklahoma. McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1996:7) argue that the challenge for social movement analysts “ is to sketch the relationships between these factors, thus yielding a fuller understanding of social movement dynamics.” Social constructionist literature has become increasingly popular within the environmental sociology literature. Analysts are drawing from framing literature, but recognizing that such constructions of reality do not occur in a vacuum. These framing processes take place within the context of power and politics, and are largely dependent on organizational resources (e.g. money, membership, networks) (Shriver et al. 1998; Shriver 2001). Framing processes also take place within a larger environment that influences an organization’s ability to mobilize effectively.

Krogman (1996) notes the importance of framing in her study of a wetlands controversy. According to Krogman (1996:371) “Stakeholder groups’ arguments for or against regulations represent frames, or versions of reality and visions of solutions.” Krogman’s research examines how environmental groups and concerned citizens are pitted against various factions over wetland issues, and looks at how these processes are restrictive to citizens due to bureaucratic regulation and red tape. Krogman’s research examines claims by environmental groups and concerned citizens that governmental considerations are based largely on political considerations and economic leverage.

In her analysis of the wetland controversy, Krogman (1996) utilizes framing concepts. She describes each stakeholder group in terms of its diagnostic disputes (i.e., the assignment of blame); its perceived antagonists (i.e., those responsible for the

controversy); and the victims (i.e., those who suffer in the environmental dispute) (Krogman 1996). She concludes that groups compete to impose their own definition of the landscape. Krogman argues that, when utilized properly, framing techniques enhance the popularity of a group's respective message to the point the argument(s) may be repeated in the media, at public meetings, and government meetings.

In this study of Picher, Oklahoma I am particularly concerned with competing stakeholder claims. I examine how the Picher community has been splintered into competing factions by the environmental controversy. Two distinct and opposing groups of citizens have organized within the Picher community. One group, the Tar Creek Basin Steering Committee, has organized in favor of a federal buyout or relocation of Picher's entire citizenry that would effectively move the entire city to a new location. A second group of citizens has organized to keep Picher in its current location. These citizens are concerned with the heritage of their community and many have historic, economic, or other ties to the land. Supporters for each group have been largely recruited through existing kin and friendship networks (Snow, Zurcher, Eklund-Olson 1980).

I am particularly interested in how two competing groups have emerged within the same community, both facing identical environmental problems. Drawing from the theoretical literature, I examine how the community has become polarized. Specifically, I address two related research questions. First, how do residents with the same material environmental conditions come to interpret these issues in such divergent ways? Second, how do residents confronting the same environmental conditions organize their efforts and articulate divergent positions and solutions to the issues? Thus, I examine how

environmental risks are interpreted differently by competing citizens groups and how each group is attempting to establish its claims for success.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODS**

In this project I employed multiple field research methods, which included in-depth interviews, document analysis, and non-participant observation at public meetings. Field research affords an opportunity not only to ask questions but also allows for a first hand observation of the citizens living in Picher. Below I discuss each method utilized and outline how the data was analyzed.

#### **In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviewing was utilized as the primary data source for this research study. Rubin and Rubin (1995:43) state that “qualitative interviewing design is flexible and continuous rather than prepared in advance and locked into stone.” In-depth interviewing allows the researcher flexibility to probe respondents further on specific issues rather than be tied to a formatted questionnaire (Babbie 1998; Rubin and Rubin 1995).

Qualitative research results obtained can be considered to be extremely valid when strict principles of qualitative strategy are observed. Validity refers to the extent or degree to which an empirical measure actually measures what is intended to measure. Having been to the source itself is a powerful technique for gaining insight into the nature of

human affairs (Babbie 1998). If the researcher reports the research findings as they were empirically observed, the results would be considered to be valid.

After reviewing the advantages of in-depth interviewing it is necessary to explore some of the shortcomings. Admittedly, in-depth interviewing involves asking questions of respondents that require recall from memory. Recall could be problematic due to the passage of time, discussions between research participants, or other valid reasons. But, for the purpose of this research, the questions asked pertained to current and ongoing phenomena. An additional problem area concerns researcher bias and/or questions posed in a biased manner. According to Babbie (1998:286), "Field research measurements, although in-depth, are also often very personal." The conclusions drawn by the researcher through the process of interpreting data may be a completely different conclusion than that shared by other observers.

My initial interview contacts were established through research trips to Picher. I identified the key leaders on each side of the controversy and began conducting interviews. I then employed a snowball sampling technique to identify additional respondents. Key respondents were asked for the names of other individuals that might be willing to participate in the study. I maintained my initial plan which involved conducting ten interviews on each side of the controversy; ten for moving the town and ten against moving it. In a small town such as Picher, ten interviews on each side of the argument were considered sufficient for this research project. In addition to the residents, I spoke with representatives from the U.S. Corps of Engineers for additional context into the environmental controversy.



A total of twenty individuals were interviewed. Of those twenty individuals, sixteen were males while the remaining four were females. In terms of marital status, eighteen reported themselves as being married, one was single, and one was a widower. As far as employment was concerned, five were retired, three were disabled due to health problems, two were homemakers, two were truck drivers, three worked for some form of governmental agency (state or local), and five worked in retail. Two of the respondents had moved out of the area for part of their adult working life, but had returned to Picher in retirement. The ages of the respondents ranged from thirty-eight to eighty-one. Three respondents had graduated from college, fourteen graduated from high school, and three dropped out of school prior to finishing the eighth grade. In terms of race, eighteen respondents were white while those remaining two were Native Americans.

Nearly all respondents had children. In terms of household income levels, one respondent was in the \$30,000 to \$50,000 range, seven were in the \$15,000 to \$30,000 range, and nine reported being below the \$15,000 household income level. Three respondents chose not to respond to the income question.

An interview guide was used for all in-depth interviews (see attachment A). The interviews were recorded on cassette tapes while field notes were simultaneously being written. Although the tape recorder cannot record facial expressions or body gestures, this dual recording process enhanced the data. The data was then be transcribed from notes and tapes and coded using the cut and paste method. I supplemented the transcripts with notes made via personal observances during the interview process concerning gestures made by the interviewees.

## Observation

For this study I utilized direct, non-participant observation of grassroots social movement activism in Picher. A central goal of qualitative research is to understand people in their real life, or naturalistic, setting (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Qualitative methodology, or field research, is thus appropriate to the study of attitudes and behaviors (Babbie 1998).

I spent time in Picher to get a better understanding of the town's history, its citizens and its environmental problems. I attempted to reasonably put myself in the position of those individuals that I wished to understand (Babbie 1998). According to Erving Goffman (cited in Loffland 1995:45) "You are close to them while they are responding to what life does to them. I feel that the way this is done is not, of course, just to listen to what they talk about, but to pick up their minor grunts and groans as they respond to their situation."

I attended a monthly meeting of the Tar Creek Basin Steering Committee and a meeting of the Speak Out organization. I attended those two separate meetings during the time frame allowed for conducting interviews for this study. During each meeting, I introduced myself as a graduate student at Oklahoma State University, introduced my research project to them, and asked for volunteers to participate in the study.

## Document Analysis

Another method utilized in this research project was document analysis. Due to the exploratory nature of the project, document analysis proved to be an important source

of information. I examined relevant newspaper articles, web sites, government documents, and local sources on Picher history. The information from document analysis supplements the in-depth interviews and observations.

### Data Analysis

The data for this study was gathered over a three month period. I made initial interview contacts while attending a monthly meeting with the Tar Creek Steering Basin Committee. I then traveled to Picher and interviewed respondents in their homes and other convenient sites. In cases where it was not possible to talk to the respondent in person, I conducted the interviews over the phone. The tape recordings made during interviews with respondents were transcribed from the audio version onto computer disks and supplemented with notes written during the interviews.

The transcribed interviews were then coded into a series of relevant categories based on the conceptual issues outlined earlier. Once all of the interviews had been coded, I began to write up my study results. I drew directly from the interview data (i.e. quotes) to illustrate relevant points in analyzing the controversy in Picher.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **A COMMUNITY DIVIDED BY ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROVERSY**

In this chapter I analyze the data gathered from in depth interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis. The chapter begins with a general overview of the Picher community. This brief historical background provides some context for interpreting the current community conflict. Next, I outline my analysis, which is organized around the two opposing positions within the community of Picher. The circumstances in Picher allow for an examination into how community residents living with the same conditions have come to define environmental issues in very different ways.

#### Overview of Picher

In this section I provide a brief overview of the town of Picher, Oklahoma. This discussion is not intended to be an extensive description. Rather, the goal of this section is to provide some historical context for interpreting the current controversy. I begin with a general historical overview. Next, I discuss some of the general demographic characteristics of Picher. I then discuss the city's environmental problems related to nearly eight decades of intense mining operations. Finally, I discuss the health concerns linked to environmental conditions that have been raised by some community residents.

## Picher as a Mining Town

The history of Picher is centered around commercial mining. Hard rock mining for lead and zinc, referred to locally as “Jack,” began in 1891. Mining operations continued there for nearly eighty years before mining operations ceased altogether in 1970, the same year that Eagle-Picher Mining Company pulled out. Northeastern Oklahoma was the largest producer of lead in the United States during those eighty years.

The importance of mining in the area surrounding Picher, commonly known as the Tri-State mining district (Kansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri), can be traced back to the early Spaniard exploiters of minerals in the New World. The earliest lead deposits in the area were mined in the Missouri part of the Tri- State district because the deposits there were shallower than those located in Oklahoma. Commercial mining began in Missouri around 1850, and Joplin was the center for mining operations during that time period. Around 1891, the mining operations slowly began to move East into what is now known as Oklahoma (Gibson 1982).

Mining camps began to spring up throughout the northeastern corner of Oklahoma during the 1890’s. In the location where the town of Picher is now situated, a driller first discovered lead in 1914. As a result, the town of Picher was developed. Within months, the population of Picher had soared to more than one thousand, and continued to grow steadily until after World War II. Picher was significant not only because of the abundance of lead ore, but also because of its geographical location relative to the surrounding mines in the area. Picher became the central location to place mills for milling the ore from surrounding towns. The ore from surrounding mines was shipped to Picher

by mules and wagons until the railroads came in and built spurs from the outer mining communities into Picher. During the mining period, decisions made in Picher affected the surrounding communities of Cardin, Commerce, Quapaw, and North Miami. Ironically, after years of relative obscurity, Picher is once again playing an important role in the region.

Underground mining is demanding and dangerous work. Those who worked in the mines realized that every time they stepped into the bucket that lowered them down into the mine their lives were in danger. There were no governmental health or safety regulations to safeguard the workers against the dangers encountered below. If a miner was hurt or killed on the job, there was no insurance to provide for the family. While they were at work, miners stood in water that rotted their boots and they breathed in dust that contaminated their lungs. They often suffered from powder headaches brought on by the blasting done in the mines.

The mining method used in the Tri-State area was referred to as the “room-and-pillar method.” In this mining process, miners would sink shafts straight down into the ground to begin blasting with dynamite. The ore loosened by the blast was then raised by large buckets to the surface and hauled to the mill. As the loose ore was removed “rooms” gradually began to emerge in the lead and ore formations below. These rooms eventually turned into huge caverns that were several hundred feet in depth and continued for miles. As one resident reported, “There are over 300 miles of mine shafts down there.” Another long time Picher resident described the caverns, stating, “They say you could walk from Picher to Joplin underground before the shafts flooded.” During the

mining operations, miners would intentionally blast and dig around certain areas leaving large support pillars, or piers, in the caverns simply by removing the ore from around them. Often the pillars rose over 300 feet to the ceiling as the miners continued to enlarge the caverns and dig around the pillars. These “rooms” and “pillars” play an important role in the complex environmental issues concerning Picher today.

During the peak of mining operations, the population of Picher ranged from 25,000 to 40,000 people. According to one lifetime Picher resident, “When we [my spouse and I] were dating fifty years ago, you couldn’t walk downtown. The sidewalks and businesses on Main Street were so full of people you couldn’t get around. We had J. C. Penney’s and Sears and all the big department stores. This was booming place.” The majority of the population was made up of miners, or people involved in the support of mining operations. Support personnel for mining operations included muleskinners, blacksmiths, and livery men who cared for the hundreds of mules and draft horses that had to be maintained in the underground mines, as well as those utilized above ground.

In the mid 1950’s, mining operations began to scale back. Prices for imported lead and zinc were undercutting American production prices and as a result the Eagle-Picher Mining Company announced that they would begin to pursue other mining interests and industries (Gibson 1982). Many jobs were lost and those miners that were able to followed the mining industry to other locations. Those who stayed in Picher sought local employment. Many went to work at the Goodyear Tire plant located in nearby Miami. Eagle-Picher maintained a mill for the smaller mining operations until it finally closed in 1970. Further depressing the area, Goodyear Tire closed in the mid 1980’s.

There has been a long history of health concerns related to mining operations. Picher is located in Ottawa County, a county recognized for many years as having the highest tuberculosis mortality rate in the United States (Nieberding 1983). In 1923, a clinic opened for the miners to begin receiving annual physicals. For many miners, this was a first step in regular health care. Even during these early days of the mining operations, health nurses went into homes to check on miners and they kept track of the health conditions of the children in area schools (Nieberding 1983).

This brief historical overview of Picher sheds light on the difficult economic conditions of the area. Residents have a long history associated with mining operations. There is also a long tradition of economic struggle. Picher residents have adapted to changing conditions in the past, but recent concerns over environmental issues has divided the community. In the next section I discuss current conditions in Picher. I then turn to my analysis of the community conflict.

### Picher Demographics

Picher is located in Ottawa County on Oklahoma State Highway 69. It is nine miles north of Miami, Oklahoma, and its northern city limit is just one mile south of the Kansas border. The city itself encompasses approximately one thousand three hundred forty three acres, or just about four square miles of land area. Data from the U.S. Census over the past four measurement periods indicate that Picher's population has declined from a high of 2,363 in 1970 to 1,740 in 2000. A recent report from the mayor of Picher indicates that the current population has dropped to 1,600. The mayor also reports that



the city has lost revenue from 50 water meter customers since September of 2000. This loss is significant in at least two aspects. First, the loss of revenue leaves the remaining inhabitants to pay Picher's debts. Second, the migration out of Picher coincides with the current controversy. Some residents feel that the recent out-migration is directly related to the community's ongoing conflict.

Picher's Chamber of Commerce reports that the majority of the current population is white (seventy-seven percent). Nearly fourteen percent ( 13.8) of the population is Native American, and the remaining nine percent is comprised of other racial categories. The Chamber of Commerce also reports that there are 523 students enrolled in the public schools, kindergarten through high school. Picher and Cardin consolidated their schools several years ago and the school is known as Picher-Cardin. The school employs forty people, thirty-eight teachers and two custodians, making it one of Picher's largest employers.

Many of the businesses in Picher have closed due to a flailing local economy and dwindling population. The last remaining business on Picher's Main Street closed during the 1990's, leaving only barren buildings and store fronts. The remaining businesses in town are located along Oklahoma State Highway 69.

### Environmental Problems

The most visible environmental problems in Picher are related to the chat piles and to Tar Creek. The huge chat piles contain over 75,000,000 tons of chert and limestone, commonly known as "chat." They look like huge pyramids standing within the city limits

of Picher. Chert itself is a type of hard stone and is not believed to be related to mineral contamination. The residue, or waste, from the mining operations was washed into ponds known as “millponds.” According to the Environmental Protection Agency and the Superfund Task Force, there are still some eight hundred acres in the Picher area covered by millponds (Governor Keating’s Superfund Task Force 2000). As one respondent explains, “It’s not the chat, it’s the lead, the fines [sandy like dirt]. Yeah, they’re full of lead. The fines are down near the bottom perhaps, but the millponds are the main place. The old mill pond sites.”

There is also a serious environmental problem associated with the limestone in the chat piles. Limestone is a soft sedimentary rock. Mining operations deposited limestone in the chat piles, along with the chert, as a natural mining byproduct. The presence of limestone in the chat is identifiable by limestone’s yellowish-tan color. By comparison, chert is white, black and gray. A respondent discusses the limestone and chert stating, “Since you’ve been here you’ve noticed that they’ve dumped a lot of limestone rock on the roads. As it’s traveled on it’s soft and it turns into baby powder. The chat [chert] won’t crumble.” Thus while the hard consistency of the chert makes it impossible for it to absorb and hold heavy metals, the limestone can absorb heavy metals.

The other visible environmental problem is Tar Creek itself. A dam was built north of Picher several years ago which cost of several million dollars. The dam was intended to divert Tar Creek around the chat pile and millpond contamination associated with Picher, but the effort was only moderately successful. The area of Tar Creek south of Picher and near northern Cardin is considered by most to be relatively clean. But, south of Cardin,

the creek is thought to be highly contaminated. A resident explains, “From Cardin north Tar Creek isn’t contaminated. For a mile south of Cardin it’s really contaminated and there are no fish.”

There are other environmental problems that are less visible. Because of the mining operations there is a problem with the ground caving in causing sinkholes. This problem is related to mining out the underground pillars that were initially left as supports for the earth above the mining operations. One respondent stated, “The last thing Eagle-Picher did was high-grade the piers trying to get all the lead out of these shafts.” There are now approximately fifteen hundred open mineshafts in the area and countless numbers of test holes that were drilled in search of lead. There are also several hundred vent shafts located throughout the area. Many individuals interviewed indicated there is no way to know where all the vent shafts and test holes have been drilled in search of lead.

### Health Issues

There are serious health concerns in the area related to Picher’s environmental problems. The concern over health, especially that of children, dates back to issues raised by health officials as far back as the 1920’s. Health issues related to children, especially those under the age of six, continue to be a concern. More recently the Quapaw tribe, acting through Tribal Efforts Against Lead (TEAL), has undertaken an initiative to educate young children on the importance of cleanliness in relation to contamination. Children are taught not to crawl on their hands and knees on the ground, and to wash their hands several times a day. Young children are also instructed not to place their hands in their mouths. While this may be basic advice for children everywhere, the importance is

magnified in Picher where the blood-lead levels of the children are estimated to be higher than those of children living outside the mining area are.

Governor Keating's Tar Creek Superfund Task Force (2000) report by the health sub-committee made several recommendations regarding health issues. Among those recommendations is the initiation of long term studies on health outcomes of children and the affects of lead/heavy metals on adults and adolescents. The sub-committee recommended several areas of focus including neurological effects, kidney disease, hearing loss, cancers, and Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. One resident reflected on the higher incidence of kidney related problems in the former mining area stating, "There are two dialysis machines [centers] in Miami and only one in Joplin, a town of seventy thousand people. You tell me why."

Thus, there are serious environmental problems in the area. Picher is one of the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund sites, making it officially recognized as one of the country's "most contaminated" sites. Some residents have grown increasingly concerned, and are demanding a federal relocation or buyout. Another group of residents is downplaying the seriousness of the environmental problems. They are fighting to maintain Picher in its current location. In the following sections I outline each perspective. I discuss the organizing efforts of the two competing sides and outline how they are framing their arguments to government officials, other residents, and the general public.

#### Residents for Relocation

In this section I outline the position of Picher residents who support a federal

buyout and relocation. Their position is grounded in their serious concerns over environmental problems and the resulting threats to human health and wellbeing. Those residents who want a buyout or relocation of the city of Picher have organized their efforts around an organization known as the “Tar Creek Basin Steering Panel.”

The Steering Panel was organized in September 2000, one month before Governor Keating’s Tar Creek Superfund Task Force final report was released with recommendations for Picher and the area. Governor Keating’s Task Force recommended assembling a local Steering Committee comprised of the following:

Mayors of Picher and Cardin	Picher Housing Authority
Quapaw Tribe Chair	Ottawa County Health Department
Picher/Cardin business people	State Senator, District #1,
State Representative, District #7	Governor’s Task Force,
U.S. Representative, District #2	U.S. Senator(s)
Environmental Protection Agency	Housing and Urban Development
Department of Transportation	Bureau of Indian Affairs

However, the actual committee that formed does not include most of the individuals and agencies named by Governor Keating’s Tar Creek Superfund Task Force. What did emerge is the “Tar Creek Basin Steering Committee” which I will refer to as the “Steering Panel.” The Steering Panel itself is comprised of approximately twenty active individuals, although it is supported by a far greater number of people. One organizer stated, “When we put this thing together I picked people that fit every aspect of life here in town. You know, like people on private property, BIA property, renters, homeowners, business people, bankers, schools. Each item pretty well affected by this is pretty well covered.” Some residents, especially those opposing relocation, have criticized the Steering Panel make-up for not including those recommended by the governor’s Task

Force. According to one critic, “I think they’re an illegal committee. They don’t have the people on there that were recommended by the Task Force.”

Although the Steering Panel states that it is theoretically “open” to those residents who want to remain in Picher, residents understand that the panel is an organization supporting the relocation campaign. Individuals on both sides of the controversy understand that the goal of this group is to win a federal buyout, or have the entire community relocated. An opponent of the relocation campaign criticized the Steering Panel’s claim to represent the community, stating, “He [Steering Panel organizer] is leaning more toward a buyout than he will admit. He likes to say he is checking out all the options.” Reinforcing the view that other options are beyond consideration, a Steering Panel organizer had this to say, “We’re going down to meet with Senator Nickles Wednesday and ask him to seriously consider allocating funds in fiscal year ’03, which begins in October, to seriously consider relocating Picher and Cardin.” Thus, while theoretically “open” to competing views, residents understand that the Steering Panel is leading a campaign for relocating Picher.

In the next section I outline the factors shaping the relocation group’s perception of environmental problems. I include a discussion of risk perception and identify some of their health concerns. Next, I discuss some of the features of their organization, including the group’s basic agenda, membership, and activities. I then discuss how this group is framing their arguments to recruit support and win a federal buyout.

## Perceptions of Environment Problems and Health Concerns

Picher residents supporting the move indicate serious concern over the community's environmental problems. Respondents have heard an abundance of evidence about the extent of the community's environmental problems. As other average citizens, they must largely rely on scientific experts and outsiders to inform them on the "extent" of the problems and the level of seriousness. A respondent discusses his general concerns, "Several things have me concerned. The health aspects of the high lead levels. I'm concerned about the poor way the environmental issues are being managed by the State and the Environmental Protection Agency. I'm concerned about the lack of outrage on the part of the people who live in Picher themselves, as well as the state, all the state officials; the various agencies as well as elected officials."

Another resident discusses how the "uncertainty" surrounding the environmental problems has affected residents. According to the respondent, "The major concern is the unknown. We really don't know. You Know? What I would like is some way to lead test it [the chat] ourselves. I don't trust them [Government] at all." When asked if he trusted the government's cleanup efforts, the respondent stated, "No, Of course not!" He paused for a moment and then stated, "Yeah right, the government!" Another respondent concurred with this sentiment, discussing the lack of information:

Honestly, we still don't know what the risks are. There's the problem. We still don't know. They tested our yards and then they came back and re-tested them and they're hotter than when they first tested them. So there's a problem.

Residents have lived with the chat pile deposits for several decades, but they recently became concerned with the possible hazards associated with them. For many

years they were just “chat piles,” more or less something to look at and play on.

However, the views have now changed. When asked about concern over the environment and implications of health problems associated with the chat piles a respondent states,

I think that in the back of my mind there’s always a suspicion as to the high incidence of these kinds of problems. You just can’t put your finger on them. It probably really wasn’t until I came back here. I just began to learn and talk to people. You have to talk to a lot of people and get a lot of different perspectives and read a lot, you know. We had a [physician] from [University] that’s been out the last two years at this conference that’s held in May each year. Two years ago he talked about the affects of lead. Last year he talked about the affects of manganese. But, anyway it’s just through reading articles. I’ve got articles from all over the country. For instance, I’ve got the Michigan study on blood lead levels in the state of Michigan. I’ve probably got twenty or thirty documents on blood lead levels. It’s really just been since I’ve been here. Secondly, I’ve been retired and I have a lot of time to spend on it.

Another Respondent discussed the evidence of pollution found on his truck. He states, “You can look on the front of my pickup right now and see the dust. We had a rainstorm last night. It’s got chat dust all over the top of it. It’s spreading through the air. You can see it! It was clean yesterday. You can see it!” Examination of the truck revealed distinct yellowish-tan colored dust circles deposited by raindrops. The yellowish-tan colored dirt is residue from the chat piles.

Nearly all of those interviewed, regardless of which side of the issue they had chosen to represent, discussed the dust from the chat piles. According to one respondent, “When you clean your house and go back ten minutes later it’s already dusty again. When it comes in it is terrible. When you have a windy day here you can’t even open a window.” Another respondent added, “Yeah, the dust blows and it gets bad. We filmed it. We wanted some proof to show the people that kinda doubt there is a dust problem around here.”



## Trust in Government Cleanup Efforts and Hope for the Future

Those residents supporting the federal buyout of Picher are very critical of the government's cleanup and remediation efforts in the community. This criticism is one of the basic arguments in the Steering Panel's bid to have Picher's citizens "bought out," or the town "relocated." Residents seeking a buyout have been exceedingly critical of the cleanup efforts. This criticism is based around the feeling that Picher cannot be reasonably, or affordably, remediated to sustain a safe and reasonable quality of life. One of the central arguments by residents supporting relocation is the feeling that much of the money that has been spent in Picher has been wasted. Picher residents are particularly critical of the government's use of clay to replace topsoil in yards as part of the remediation process. A respondent explains the problem when asked if the remediation efforts have been successful:

Houses are moldy and when they built the yards up did they didn't use transits to level the yards. [They put back] Too much clay. They're taking 18 inches of black soil out and replacing it with 12 inches of clay and the rest with black soil to save money. That's the problem. Water stays on top of the yards now and goes under the houses because it can't go anywhere else.

Another respondent also discusses the problems encountered with the use of clay in yards. He states,

You know they came in here and started their remediation and they started back filling these yards with clay. And so, the next thing you know after a couple of years people started complaining about water under their homes about the poor drainage and things like that because of this clay. They couldn't go out and plant a garden or plant a tree because they couldn't penetrate the damn clay.

A respondent offered these critical comments of the Environmental Protection Agency, arguing that they had actually "caused" additional problems:

So, you know EPA's receiving all these complaints and they even settled some claims on some houses for property damage from standing water and stuff like that. So then the EPA, in one of their dog and pony shows, says we'll just have a public meeting, have a roundtable discussion and work all these problems out. So they get a round table and have a public meeting and have this EPA facilitator, you know, comes in. This lady comes in, this is what she's trained to do, to facilitate these meetings. Well, we'll work these problems out. They did this in all three towns. And every town, everybody was bitching about the clay top back fill. The EPA knew what the people's stance was on it. But you know what they're using today? Clay! They're still using clay. They haven't changed a flipping thing.

Many respondents for relocation emphasized the waste of tax payer dollars associated with the poor cleanup efforts. According to one respondent,

...the rest of the money they spent here recently [doing] phase I yard remediation and phase II remediation at an average cost of 20,000 bucks a yard [versus \$6,000 per yard in Baxter Springs, KS]. They were supposed to take out 18 inches. They took 3 feet out of my yard. They put clay back in. There's no soil percolation. When it rains the water runs under my house. What was their answer? They put a sump pump under my house.

Another respondent described the clean-up attempts by the Environmental Protection Agency by stating, "It's Terrible! It's fraud!" Along this same line of thought, another respondent summarized the cleanup by stating, "Greed and corruption! Now the bunch that was in here before got 50 million dollars. Fraud! I think the attempt to clean up is just people sticking money in their pocket. I think it's a scam all the way to the top, payoffs and stuff."

Complaints about the replacement of topsoil with clay was a common theme in the Picher relocation arguments. Respondents believe that the clay was used because it is cheaper, more readily available, and easier to obtain. Several respondents believe that the cleanup efforts have been a miserable failure. According to one respondent,

The work hasn't been successful. If you test the yards they are still as hot or hotter than they were when they started. Just like my yard, they never even did part of the front yard or between the house and the garage. Then they bring my

yard up 9” higher than it was and the water runs to my house and floods around it. It’s a botched up mess. I have nothing good to say about them. They have come in and ruined a lot of homes for a lot of people around here. This old house, it ain’t much, but it’s our home.

Residents are also upset that many of the yards have been remediated and the sources for lead contamination, the chat piles, are still present in Picher. Many residents feel that all cleanup efforts will be futile as long as the chat piles remain in the area. One respondent explains, “I don’t see how these yards that have been remediated can keep from being recontaminated just from Mother Nature through wind and rain. There’s really no law in effect to keep anybody from recontaminating anything.” Another respondent concurs, “They’re remediating yards on homes that are right next to a chat pile. You tell me how that’s going to keep from getting recontaminated!” Another added, “In the one hundred plus million they’ve spent here, I think a lot of it was wasted. They didn’t use the common sense approach to a lot of work they did.” Many citizens feel that the Environmental Protection Agency has been working “backwards” in their efforts to clean up Picher.

Thus, residents hold the Environmental Protection Agency responsible for actually contributing to the environmental problems in Picher rather than remediating them. They voiced concerns about the lack of local input into decision-making. Citizens feel that they know more about the area than anyone else, and that they should have at least had some input into decisions being made about their town. They also cited a variety of management problems. According to one frustrated respondent, “EPA stands for extremely poor administration.” Another states, “Pretty much a waste of one hundred million dollars!”

### Organizing Concern: The Tar Creek Steering Panel

As previously stated, citizens supporting the Federal buyout have mobilized their efforts largely through the organized efforts of the “Tar Creek Steering Panel.” While any local resident can join the organization, the goal of the organization is to obtain a federal buyout, or relocation. In this section I discuss the group’s overall agenda and strategies, its efforts to recruit supporters, and its access to resources.

General Agenda and Strategies Used by the Steering panel. Many residents believe that the Steering Panel’s agenda has been directed toward buyout/relocation from the beginning. Critics argue that the specific agenda appears to have been “masked” by a proposal to gather information for the citizens. While the ultimate goal of the Steering Panel is to obtain a buyout, members do emphasize related issues of concern. One of the primary issues includes concern about learning disabilities, particularly among younger children.

A Steering Panel member explained the Steering Panel’s agenda stating, “It’s been to study about reading and learning disabilities. It’s never been to move Picher. [Name] lets on like that’s the agenda and has been his agenda. The groups not a 100% for anything.” The respondent emphasizes the openness of the Steering Panel stating, “Anybody can come. That’s the point, to find out what’s best.” Another individual, speaking about the panel’s agenda, also stated that the agenda was to gather information. He states,

Well, when it formed the only thing we was advised was to get information. That’s really what it was formed for. All we would do is go around and find out what people wanted to do, find out what was causing the health problems and we

would just relay it back to officials. And we've been doing this for about two years now and it seems like there's just a stop there. Nobody will make the right decision.

Another member explains, "We have a charter which really is in the simpler sense is to represent the broader environmental issues of the area." Despite broader interests, the goal of relocation is quite clear as the respondent continues, "I think a lot of us think that [relocation] is the only thing to do. "Most members of the Steering Panel voiced their position in favor of the buyout/relocation option. One member states clearly,

I think the only solution to me is to relocate the town. Much as they did in Manford [Oklahoma] when they built Keystone Lake or Kaw City [Oklahoma] or Prue [Oklahoma]. To me, the solution is to buy the people out and let them go their merry way, or move the towns of Picher and Cardin.

Citizens in Picher believe that the Steering Panel's agenda has always been to campaign for buyout/relocation. Many residents believe a federal buyout is the only reasonable solution based on the magnitude of the environmental problems and the effects on the local economy and on property values. A respondent describes the problems associated with property values stating, "I would move today but we live on Indian land and nobody will buy my house. You can't get a loan to redo your house or nothing. There's a bank in town but they don't loan money on houses when the house is on Indian land." Another respondent, referring to the failed efforts of the Environmental Protection Agency to cleanup the area, states, "They [EPA] have done nothing but absolutely reduce people's property values here to zero."

Residents supporting buyout/relocation believe that if the Steering Panel is able to apply enough pressure to win a federal buyout of the local properties by the government, Picher's properties will be worth substantially more than they are today. One respondent

explained the situation in this manner,

Where it's been bought out due to contamination, federal guidelines that we've been able to find tell you that you have to go by the appraised values within a fifty mile radius without taking into consideration the contamination in the area you are being bought out in. So, say a 15,000 square foot house in Miami on two lots is what you should get here. Even in Joplin. Of course they take an average.

In efforts to achieve their goal of a federal buyout, the Steering Panel has employed various strategies. They have pressured politicians at the local, state, and federal levels. They have also reached a much larger audience and thereby put pressure on politicians by bringing in media coverage from Tulsa, via the *Tulsa World* and KOTV channel 6. Through their organizing efforts, they also prompted the national media into Picher. Picher's environmental crisis was publicized on the national news program *Nightline* with Ted Koppel (March 1, 2002). The group has been media savvy. In an opening scene on the *Nightline* special, one of the leaders of the Steering Panel proclaimed, "Welcome to Hell!" These comments, along with the visual images of chat piles have impacted support for the relocation campaign, and attracted additional attention from state politicians.

Local Support and Access to Resources. If it were not for the huge chat piles and other remnants from the earlier mining days, Picher would be no different than any other small rural town in Oklahoma with sixteen hundred inhabitants. In small rural communities residents generally know nearly everyone else in town. Certainly in that aspect Picher is no different than other small rural communities. Thus, support for the relocation campaign was garnered through close contacts with friends and family networks. Differential recruitment and networking are greatly enhanced when individuals

are familiar with each other, with the area, and with the opposition (McAdam and Paulsen 1993).

The participants on the Steering Panel were recruited through local contacts. When asked about the decision to join the Steering Panel one respondent stated, “[Name] asked me to join. [He] asked me where all the cave-ins were.” Another individual explained he was invited to join because more people would increase the campaign numbers. He states, “Well, I just got involved where there would be more people. You take one or two people trying to do this can’t get it all done. I wanted to help the dig information. I got on just to help.” Another respondent explains that the group is open to anyone who wants to help, stating, “Anybody can join. If you want to go down and join nobody’s left out.” The respondent then adds that the people have to get involved to make changes. He discusses community apathy and his respect for the movement leader. According to the respondent, “There’s nobody really wants to get involved. Everybody’s sitting around waiting on them to hand over the money. They’re letting [leader] take all the heat. They want to cuss and all that. They’re real lucky to have [leader] because nobody else would have taken it.”

The Steering Panel operates without any outside funding. The Steering Panel has applied for federal grants, but those requests have all been denied. A respondent explains one failed funding effort,

We applied for an environmental justice grant and didn’t get it. It was \$20,000 grant and the EPA wouldn’t give it to us because they won’t consider the Superfund region 6 for relocation or buy out.

With no external funding, all of the groups expenses must be covered by the members

themselves. One respondent explains that funding for the organization comes “out of my pocket.” The lack of funding has not stopped the group from getting their message out to the citizens of Picher, to politicians, or to the broader public. Monthly meetings are held in the Community Building, which was built and is maintained by the housing authority. One respondent reported, “There were over three hundred people at that first meeting in September of 2000.”

The group’s leaders are acutely aware of the importance of getting the message “out” via networking. As discussed, the group has made excellent use of the media. Panel members also utilize local, state, and federal politicians. A respondent explains the importance of constant communication,

I have lines of communication open with all the government agencies. I talk with the Corps of Engineers regularly, less regularly with the EPA. Mostly with the Corps and elected officials and field reps of the elected officials and make sure they understand [that] they know what the issues are. I talk to them regularly and send emails back and forth and explore with them options that are available.

In the next section I explore how the Steering Panel and their supporters frame the issues in Picher to garner support for a federal buyout/relocation.

### Framing Issues to Support the Move

I have outlined the general group for relocation, and I have discussed their basic agenda. In this section I discuss the general platform of issues being promoted by members of the Steering Panel. In other words, I examine how the group is framing its arguments to political and government officials, as well as to the wider public. As indicated earlier, the platform of this group is largely based on environmental pollution and



health concerns. Thus, an important part of their framing centers on these issues. Another important component of their argument is based on identifying the responsible party for the current conditions. In this case, placing considerable blame on the government supports their position of a federal buyout. An important part of their position includes what Snow and Benford (1992) refer to as “prognostic framing.” Prognostic framing is defined as “identifying a solution to the diagnosed problem and strategies for action” (Snow and Benford 1992: 133-155). Thus, in addition to identifying a responsible party, residents offer their ideas for a solution, or “what should be done.” I outline the group’s prognostic framing and discuss their support of making the area a federal wetland.

Environmental Problems and Health Concerns as a Reason for Leaving. In this section I discuss how residents use issues related to environmental problems and health concerns as the foundation for their position supporting moving the town. According to several supporters of the move, the area cannot be made safe through the remediation of Picher’s environmental problems. They are adamant that the environment cannot be fixed. According to one respondent, the prospect of cleaning the environment in Picher is like, “Trying to fill up a barrel with an eye-dropper. You’re not going to make it.”

In addition to their belief that the work that has been done so far has been nothing more than a “cosmetic” attempt, residents also feel that there is an environmental problem that cannot be corrected, the subsidence or cave-in issue. Panel members stress that the entire forty square mile area is susceptible to cave-ins related to the old mine shafts. Some of the mine shafts are as deep as five or six hundred feet. Some residents believe that the

subsidence problem is becoming more intense. A respondent discussed the subsidence problem,

I think they're serious enough that they need to get these people the hell out of here. There's another issue, one of safety. We've had 8 cave ins, sinkholes if that's what you want to call them, in the last 18 months and that's more than we've had in the last ten years. We attribute that to the water level underground is dropping and, we who are steeped in geology such as myself, believe that all these 60,000,000,000 gallons of water that's underground here help support the roof.

Members of the Steering Panel and their supporters believe that the Oklahoma drought of the past few years is responsible for the water level dropping in the caverns below the Picher area. As a result, they believe there is an increased chance for cave-ins.

Another primary theme of the group centers around serious concerns about the health of residents, especially for younger children. One citizen stated "I didn't know too much about the lead in children until this first TEAL [Tribal Efforts Against Lead] study was done." Citizens believe that the contamination has affected learning and that remaining in the area continues to cause learning disabilities. According to one respondent,

Well, one of my sons I know tested high for lead when he was in grade school, but we didn't know it was coming from the soil. I don't know that there's any documented [proof]. He had a few problems in school. The middle boy did. I mean he graduated, don't misunderstand me, but he probably didn't reach his full potential. Had to work a lot harder to get a C than the older boy did to get an A.

Another respondent added this statement concerning learning disabilities,

Had I stayed here I would have graduated in the class of 1960. I know that when I was in grade school there were a lot of kids in class with me who could not learn. What they did was hold you back the first year and then they would move you on through school. This is a small town and the teachers knew who these kids were by name and they just passed them on through and gave them kids, there were 11 in that category. We didn't understand it years ago. There were no special classes in those days for students.

It is the general consensus of Picher's citizens that the TEAL studies brought attention to a problem that has been present for decades, but was not attributed until recently to the presence of lead in the chat piles. One respondent, reported on his awareness of the situation, "The Indian health department found the high blood lead levels in the children, and identified it, and started identifying some of the problems it caused." Concern over health issues remains a central concern of the group and is the basis of their campaign for moving the town. A respondent, when asked if he had concerns previous to the TEAL study stated,

No. Not too much really. [I] Kinda grew up with it, you know the chat piles. As far as contamination I don't think anybody here really was aware or realized the different things that would harm you. Like lead, high zinc, arsenic, cadmium, and different things they have found.

Another respondent discusses the dangers associated with the chat piles,

Well, you look around and hear more stuff about the studies, about the lead. I'm 38 years old so like when I was growing up we never heard about the lead and stuff. But now I wouldn't let my son go out and play in it [chat piles]. I don't want him to be affected.

The perception of the chat piles has changed dramatically in the past few years for citizens living in Picher. For twenty years the town has been the number one site on the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund list. But, citizens were previously not alarmed about the chat piles that they played on as children. Respondents explained that they were not alarmed by any aspect of the surrounding environment until they were made aware of the dangers. A respondent describes that he first became concerned when "...they [EPA] first came and tested out here and they had on space suits. Honest to God! That's when we first realized there was a problem."

Much of the group's campaign for moving the city of Picher is based on concerns over environmental and health issues, and this has been a major component of their platform. The group has garnered considerable support through these issues. They have received considerable media attention and support from some state politicians.

Identifying a Responsible Party. An important part of the framing activities of the Steering Panel includes identifying a responsible party. According to Snow and Benford (1992), identifying a responsible party is an important part of the framing activities. Residents supporting the move place blame on the mining companies and the agencies currently attempting to "remediate" the area. Many respondents discussed both the mining companies and the federal government. A respondent states,

I know good and well the mining companies are some responsible for it, between the government and the mining companies. [There were] pay offs years ago to leave this stuff on top of the ground instead of cleaning the environment up as they took it out. I would say it's definitely between the mining companies and the federal government, for letting them do it. They let them get by with it years ago. If you have somebody overseeing the job and they aren't doing what they are suppose to do, shut them down. They just let them get by with more or less murder.

Another respondent, answering along those same lines responded, "I think it was a combination of all [mining] companies and no oversight." When asked about the location of the mining companies today, a respondent had this response, "Why, they're rich and they're gone." In terms of responsibility, another respondent stated, "I think the mining companies and the federal government. They're the ones that paid the big subsidies."

Another respondent points to U.S. Government responsibility for allowing Picher to become contaminated to begin with. He claims,

[I blame] the federal government. Well, the mining companies did just exactly

what the mining industry would allow them to do. All this mining waste under EPA law is not considered hazardous substance although they say this chat is laden with lead dust and other harmful chemicals. Its not covered under any hazardous waste like an oil spill or anything like that. They left that out. Also the government didn't set any guidelines on this stuff [regarding] what could be left. They also required the mining companies to leave this chat on top of the ground for future revenues for the tribes. If they ordered it left here and now it's a problem then it's the USA's problem.

Thus, an important part of the groups framing of the issues includes identifying the responsible party. They blame both the mining companies and the U.S. Government. Most importantly, the U.S. Government is responsible for not protecting the public against the environmental hazards. As the previous respondent's quote indicates, "... then it's the USA's problem."

Prognostic Framing: Moving Towards a Solution. Residents supporting the move feel that the final solution to their environmental and health problems is going to involve a two-step process. The first step in that process is to move the people out of the area, either through a buyout or a relocation. The second step would involve the implementation of a world class wetlands. Buyout involves the government paying every citizen for their property and allowing them to move wherever they desire. Relocation would involve the government building a new town and moving residents *en masse* to the new location. One resident stated that residents ought to be, "Bought out completely. Put the gravel back in the holes and let it go back to the wild." An important part of framing arguments for the move involves drawing attention to "future generations." A respondent summarizes this position, stating, "The cities should be moved and continue on with life. That's what I would like to see. Keep in mind that I don't want to move. A

move is not going to help me or my health, but a move will help future generations.”

Another respondent emphasizes the importance of Picher’s future, and acknowledged the difficulties of moving an entire city. He states,

My opinion is I would love to see a relocation of Picher but I don’t think that will happen. I don’t think they are going to spend the money to build a new Picher. I think they ought to at least come in and pay the people a decent price so they can relocate themselves and their kids and their families out of this location. Well, they say you can just pack up and get out of here. Hell, I worked all of my life and my health is gone. I can’t just pack up and leave what I got here and start over, just lock it up and start over.

One other important component of the argument to relocate Picher involves turning the area into a wetlands. Residents in favor of a buyout or relocation have a substantial political ally on their side. Governor Keating has a plan to turn the area into a world class pristine wetlands that will be a hunter’s “paradise,” and a tourist recreation site. The Tar Creek Steering Panel accepted these recommendations from the governor and have centered their efforts towards a buyout or relocation around the wetland concept. For these residents, the wetlands provides a “final solution.” According to one respondent, “The wetlands is the only proposal I have seen since 1983 for a terminal end solution to the problems up here.” Another added, “It’s already a wetlands. Look around. The creeks will be backed up but there will be an awful lot of dry land.” Another respondent added his thoughts on the wetlands concept:

I can see why it would be a good thing, I mean its about the only thing they can really do with this place. It’s already nearly a swamp anyways. That’s about the only thing you can do with it. It’s damn sure not safe for human habitation, I can tell you that.

Another resident, speaking about the wetlands and the possibility of tourism in the future had this to say:

I think the wetlands is the best idea that they have come up with. Because I think if they flatten all of this here and made a wetlands it would be better for the wildlife, and you wouldn't have this dust blowing around in the air. And if they make a wildlife area out of it, it would bring more people and money in to Miami and Commerce and surrounding towns. Tourists coming in to hunt and fish and whatever. If it caves in then what would it matter, it's full of water.

Residents base their arguments for relocation on increasing environmental and health concerns. They ultimately place responsibility for the environmental conditions on the federal government. Consequently, they spell out a solution based on a federal buyout/relocation by the U.S. Government. Furthermore, residents argue that the land can be made useful again by converting the area into a wetlands.

The efforts of those supporting relocation/buyout have been organized through the Tar Creek Basin Steering Panel. They have largely recruited through existing friendships and family networks. Though they have no funding support, they have drawn attention by framing community concerns over environmental problems and health/illness issues. They have identified the U.S. Government as a responsible party, and they acknowledge that the federal government can alleviate the conditions by offering a federal buyout or supporting relocation. In the next section I outline the competing community group of citizens organizing around efforts opposed to relocation or buyout.

#### Organizing to Maintain the Picher Community

A second group of community residents want to keep Picher in its current location and maintain the community's identity. This group acknowledges that there are some environmental problems, but generally believes that health concerns are exaggerated. They have organized their efforts around a recently formed social movement organization,

“Speak Out.” Their arguments are framed around issues of history, community pride and the sense of identity. These residents emphasize the historical significance of the community, and some even speak about the aesthetic qualities of the chat piles. As discussed by Cuba and Hummon (1993), Speak Out supporters feel a strong attachment to Picher and identify with both the community and the region.

The founder and leader of the Speak Out group is a fourth generation “Picherite” who drives a truck for a living. Truck driving is a common occupation for residents in Picher because there is a shortage of local work opportunities. When asked why he got involved, the respondent states, “I just feel it is something I was meant to do and if I didn’t do it I was going to get a new address.”

Most members of Speak Out are older citizens. Speak Out supporters are all lifelong residents of the Picher community, unlike some of the Steering Panel members who moved away and then returned to the area. This may help explain Speak Out’s greater feeling of “attachment” to community. The oldest Speak Out member was a miner back in the 1940’s and ridicules those who have “never been in the ground” for trying to tell other residents that there are environmental problems. For various reasons, members of Speak Out have attachments to their community. They do not want to have the town they were raised in destroyed or relocated.

In this section of the thesis I discuss how these residents perceive the environmental problems that have been identified in the community. I then discuss the formation of Speak Out, and discuss the group’s agenda and general activities to support keeping the community intact. I then outline how these residents frame their arguments



for maintaining the community.

### Environmental Concern and Health Effects

Members of Speak Out live with the same environmental conditions as the competing group, including the large chat piles and health issues. The chat pile evidence is overwhelming as there are approximately 75,000,000 tons of residual mining waste lying within the city limits of Picher. Despite these conditions, there are individuals in Picher who are not alarmed about their environment. According to one respondent, "I'm not afraid of Picher. If I was even able to have babies now, I'd still not be afraid to raise my babies here. I raised my two children here and I raised my grandchildren here. I am not a bit afraid of Picher!"

These residents feel safe among the chat piles in Picher. A respondent discussed his lack of concern, stating, "We used to play on these chat piles when we were growing up. Motorcycles use to climb up the hills almost straight up and some times they would fall over backwards and come all the way back down. We never had any concerns with contamination. And when we were growing up it was a lot worse then than it is now because all these companies were running day and night, and the dust was just thick."

Another respondent, referring to his perception of the hazards surrounding the chat piles and their association with elevated lead levels in the Picher's children had this to say, "I'm not so sure the chat piles are the source of contamination. Now I'm gonna be honest about it. [Name] had 3 tailing piles leased for the county. Out of those 3 not a one tested over 500 parts per million."

One member of Speak Out acknowledges, "There could be problems with the chat

piles,” but, the respondent was not ready to concede that Picher had to be moved. He addressed the Environmental Protection Agency’s yard remediation program and spoke about his perception of the general health of Picher’s citizens. He states,

I think they’ve cleaned it up a lot. I know some have got houses right by the chat piles. And so, they’ll probably always have a chat pile. And they’re all about my age that live there and their health seems to be fine.

Another respondent was convinced there is no threat in the community that he has lived in for nearly seventy years. According to the respondent,

I swam in these old ponds and played on the chat piles. When I was a kid we carried lead around and for speed I carried a little chunk under my tongue. So if you’re gonna get contaminated you really must have to wallow in it.

Residents for staying in Picher expressed numerous doubts that the local environment is harmful. Some respondents pointed out other potential sources of problems for area children’s health. According to one respondent, “[There are] cases where the kids ate paint out of a house. They came in and painted the house and remediated the yard and the kid didn’t improve. Turned out he was getting paint off a painted toy.” Another stated:

It’s the lead thing. The only ones that really have problems are the real little kids. But, you know what? If they could clean it up like what the EPA is doing and teach the kids to wash their hands. Our grand kids live here and our grandson is 3 and he washes his hands. I think some of the problems are dirty little kids. They’re just uneducated.

Thus, some respondents are shifting the blame away from local environmental conditions. Several respondents addressed the cleanliness aspect regarding children playing on the chat piles. According to one respondent,

I think it is affecting some people. But, now I don’t want you to think I’m uppity or anything like that, but it’s people that don’t stay clean. You know what I mean? They let their kids go out and play. And you know, kids do, they go out

and play in the dirt and everything. But then they don't make them clean up like they should. I mean, I played on it [chat] when I was growing up. My mom says I used to eat dirt when I was a kid.

Another respondent, attempting to divert attention away from the chat piles as the source for elevated lead levels, rationalized why he thought lead levels might be high and what he thought should be done about the situation in this manner:

My little girl was tested when she was five and she has lived here all of her life. She didn't have any high lead levels in her blood. I think it's a combination of different things. It depends on if the home the children are living in has lead based paint. I ate a lot of chat when I was a kid because I spent lots and lots of time on the chat piles. If that's a possibility for those kids on the chat piles, I'm not going to deny that maybe that has something to do with it. So if that has something to do with it, keep your kids off the chat piles!

Another respondent recounted a story from a recent meeting in Picher. The respondent explains, "I was at a meeting and a lady leaned over and said she had her grandchildren out of here. Now maybe they could learn something. The respondent then explains that, "Somebody leaned over and asked if she was sure it wasn't the inbreeding because you did bad in school [too]."

Residents supporting the Steering Panel emphasize the serious environmental conditions related to the cave-ins, a consequence of undermining the area and then "high grading" the pillars as mining operations were coming to a close. Supporters of Speak Out, by contrast, think the Steering Panel is "blowing things out of proportion." A respondent explains,

I don't think there are any risks from cave-ins or sinkholes. There's a couple of old miners that live here that don't either. There's a couple of people on the committee that goes around, I don't know how they find out, and says there's been another cave in, there's another one. I'm told by these old miners that there hasn't been a subsidence for about thirty to thirty five years. There are some of these old mineshafts, there's so many of them that they threw old car bodies in them and then pushed chat in on [th]em and dirt on top. That water down there will every once in awhile eat through that car body.

One respondent, who is very active in the Speak Out organization, admitted that there are problems concerning Picher and its environment. He stated, "I'm not going to sit here and tell you we don't have problems, because we do." Then, referring to the Steering Panel's efforts to accomplish a buyout or relocation the respondent claimed, "I don't believe it is as bad as it is made out to be for the simple reason that you can't get your agenda pushed through if you don't make things look pretty bad. This is not the Titanic." He also stated that he had been in contact with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Corps of Engineers, and they all informed him, "It was fixable."

#### Attitudes Towards Government Cleanup Efforts

While several of the respondents supporting Speak Out were frustrated with the government's cleanup efforts to date, they were far more supportive than members of the Steering Panel. Some of the respondents for keeping Picher in its current location actually praised the government's efforts. According to one respondent, "I think they're doing a good job. They are cleaning." Another Picher citizen gave the contractors and the government overseers a positive endorsement for their effort, but also acknowledged a problem that was addressed by the Steering Panel:

They're trying, I can see that. But, there are a lot of yards they have messed up. Instead of doing any good, they've messed them up. [How have they messed them up?] Well, where the water use to didn't stand in people's yards, now it does.

One respondent, while admitting her yard had been negatively altered, voiced her unequivocal support of the Environmental Protection Agency in this manner,

I think the EPA's doing a good job. They haven't hauled a third of the chat off. They did redo our yard. They done ours several years ago. Ours was one of the first ones done. I'm pleased with it other than water did start to accumulate under

the house. I think they've done a good job.

Other respondents were frustrated with the government in general, and especially with the Environmental Protection Agency. A common theme centered on the amount of money that has been "wasted" in Picher on failed cleanup efforts. There is also a general mistrust among the residents based on their feeling that the Environmental Protection Agency does not care about the residents of Picher. Residents believe that once the Environmental Protection Agency's job is "finished," no matter what the actual physical condition of Picher, they are leaving and Picher residents will be stuck living with the end result. The oldest respondent interviewed, an eighty-one year old Great Grandmother who has resided in Picher all of her life, also discussed the use of clay in her yard. She stated,

Well, if they hadn't put clay in my ground where the water stands it'd be fine. But where they put the clay when it rains the water stands in the yard. And you've got to have a pair of boots to get to the gate and out of the yard.

Another long time resident of the area discussed his concerns with the Environmental Protection Agency's cleanup efforts. According to the respondent,

It [the cleanup] was terrible in the beginning. There was millions that was spent that shouldn't have been spent. Cleanup on the yards was a terrible job. They created such a drainage problem that you can't imagine how terrible it was by putting clay back in there where they took the dirt out. They packed it in. You know clay is a packing soil and that's what they put on the bottom of ponds and stuff to hold water. Water won't go through it. It won't perk. And all the water just runs right off the top where it use to perk. I'm not satisfied at all and I don't think there's very many people you can talk to here that are satisfied.

Another respondent, who lives south of Picher, discussed his frustration with the Environmental Protection Agency. Referring to remediation efforts south of Picher, the

respondent states,

They stopped in Commerce. And because of the delay in funding through the state they stopped remediation in all communities everywhere except on Indian land, BIA land. EPA went ahead with that. One of the things that happened with the remediation when they first started they began to bring in topsoil to put on top. Then they began running out of sources for top soil or the source where they were, they was running out of top soil and they began to bring in clay. From that point on problems began to develop. We tried to tell the Corps and we talked to the EPA to no avail whatsoever. You don't make suggestions to the EPA they don't listen.

Another respondent summarized the cleanup efforts reflecting common sentiment among many Picher residents regarding the cleanup efforts, stating "I think it's a big joke. The dirt they took to remediate the yards came from right below a chat pile. Dust blows and dirt blows. How are you going to keep it from getting contaminated again? Tell me that."

#### Organizing the Opposition: Speak Out

In this section I discuss resident's efforts to organize around keeping the community in its current location. As discussed earlier, the organization that emerged for that purpose is "Speak Out." Although Speak Out members acknowledge, to varying degrees, that there are environmental issues involved in the Picher area, they feel strongly that there is absolutely not enough problems to buyout the citizens or relocate Picher. They are emphatic in their desire that Picher should remain where it is, and that alternative solutions should be found.

Although the group's voting membership is small, their efforts represent a substantial number of Picher's residents. The leader of Speak Out has purposely kept the actual organization small in number. According to the respondent, "I don't want a big

group. That's not a conventional idea, but a lot of folks don't feel comfortable going to meetings. My idea was if we wind up putting this group together, people could come and we would share the information I had gathered over the month." There was one additional member of Speak Out when this research project started, but she was recently voted off. When asked about her removal, one member said, "She felt she was intimidated by members of the Steering Panel (the opposing group) when they found out she had joined this group. People made phone calls to her house and told her she was stupid for joining our group and she couldn't take the stress." Another respondent explains,

Well, one of our members, whenever we first got started, she wouldn't give a name, said one of the steering committee members called her up and give her, well griped at her. Told her we had no business having this committee. Give here bunch of hassle. She hasn't been to one of our meetings since that happened.

While the organization is seeking additional supporters from the community, they remain satisfied with the small size of the organization.

General Agenda and Strategies Used by Speak Out. Speak Out was organized in August 2001 in response to the position that the Steering Panel was taking concerning Picher's future. Residents who join Speak Out were alarmed that the Panel was heading the town and its residents "in the wrong direction." Although the Steering Panel had expressed their "openness" to residents that were not in line with the buyout/relocation option, individuals found that their opinions were not welcome at Steering Panel meetings. A respondent stated his position, "The people here want to stay and find other alternatives."

One individual, instrumental in organizing Speak Out, described the organization's

agenda in these terms:

I believe that the people who don't want to move have a right to be heard. I believe that relocation should only be used as a last resort. The Steering Committee's tactics and ways of doing things is every step taking us toward relocation. I don't believe relocation has to be done. Our mission statement is this: To promote looking at all options with regard to the Tar Creek Superfund site with relocation being the last option. We're dedicated to listening to, and representing the residents of the Tar Creek area and bringing these comments and concerns to all agencies involved.

Thus, respondents believe that those residents supporting buyout/relocation have an organized voice for their position through the Steering Panel. Furthermore, they believe that the Steering Panel was setting the agenda for the "entire community" when it did not represent the entire community's interests. As a result, citizens formed an organization to promote keeping Picher in its current location.

Speak Out supporters emphasize that cleanup efforts will simply take a long time. A respondent addresses the enormity of the job facing the area, lamenting that it took many decades for the problem to become such a serious issue. He explains,

Well, this problem didn't happen overnight. It's taken years for this problem to happen. You're gonna have to deal with it in the same fashion. There's not enough money to do it overnight. The problem is so immense that you couldn't do it overnight. How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. You have to start someplace.

Much of Speak Out's efforts have centered around gaining recognition for maintaining Picher. According to one member of Speak Out, the mission is, "To get the people involved and get the authorities to recognize the people involved." Another respondent explained the situation in this way, "I informed the EPA and the Corps of Engineers that we are a citizen's group interested in finding ways to clean this place up and remain. This is our home."



Organizers of Speak Out also want to clarify that “the Steering Panel” represents only one faction of the community. A respondent voiced concern that the Environmental Protection Agency and the Corps of Engineers had been misled to believe that the group representing itself as the Tar Creek Steering Committee was the same committee that Governor Keating’s Task Force had originally recommended be assembled. The respondent explains the misleading point,

There are two Steering committees. There’s an official steering committee that the governor suggested. That committee was never put into place. And [name] put his steering committee together and the EPA was even under the impression that that was official steering committee put together by the governor. That is not the case. That steering committee is as citizen run and citizen owned as my group is. It simply carried the name Steering committee which the governor happened to choose. It lends itself to making you believe that it’s the official deal, but it’s not the official deal. Even the EPA thought that it was the official deal, but that is not the case. The official steering committee does not exist because the governor never put it in place.

Accordingly, Speak Out supporters feel that the Steering Panel has received a degree of legitimacy based on a connection with the Governor of Oklahoma. An important part of Speak Out’s mission has been to “level the playing field” by equating the Steering Panel with Speak Out, since both are citizen organizations.

Recruitment and Access to Resources. The recruiting strategies used by Speak Out are similar to the networking strategies used by the Steering Panel. Given the small size of the community most residents are familiar with other residents. This familiarity allows the respective group leadership to be aware of the individuals that are more or less sympathetic with the cause represented on each side. I use the term “rural familiarity” to refer to these recruitment processes. In cases such as Picher, recruitment is facilitated by

the intimate knowledge that locals have concerning their neighbors.

The organizer of Speak Out recruited the members for the organization based, in part, on his perception of their attachment to the community. According to McAdam and Paulsen (1993), membership in organizations is merely an extension of self. This extension is appropriate in the examination of Picher. For example, one member's father was the Picher Fire Chief and died in the line of duty fighting a fire in 1976. Subsequently, the Picher City Hall and a street are both named after him. It was a source of great pride in this respondent's voice and demeanor when he stated, "They named the street [name], after my dad." Another Speak Out member is a seventy-seven year old resident who has owned the billiard parlor since 1963. He originally purchased the business because he wanted his father to have something to do when he retired from mining. The respondent has recently converted it into a mining museum.

Most members were recruited based on their perceived attachment to Picher. Another member explains that he joined, "Because I'm concerned with what's happening in the community and I'm totally against the buyout/relocation. I just thought somebody needed to stand up and say, 'Hey, let's look at other options before we go to this buyout/relocation.'" While some members indicate that they actively seek new members for the organization, others were content to leave Speak Out's voting membership at the current number and simply "represent" those residents in the community that are opposed to buyout or relocation.

While the Steering Panel has a political ally in Governor Frank Keating, Speak Out has discovered their own political ally in State Senator Rick Littlefield. According to

several sources on both sides of the issue, Senator Littlefield is opposed to a buyout or a relocation of Picher. One Speak Out supporter reported, "Senator Rick Littlefield is dead set against it [buyout or relocation]. He doesn't want to take anyone's property."

Another respondent states,

Every time they [Steering Panel] make a little headway, somebody sticks a foot out somewhere. We don't know who's doing it...I'll say Rick Littlefield has a lot to do with it.

Characterizing the Local Opposition. Members and supporters of Speak Out strongly believe that the buyout campaign and the efforts of the Steering Panel are being driven by money. Supporters of Speak Out repeatedly discussed the fact that the Steering Panel has attracted community support for the buyout/relocation through rumors related to financial incentives. Residents understand that property values in the city are extremely low, and Speak Out opponents argue that members of the Steering Panel are telling residents that a government buyout would bring maximum values for property. A member of Speak Out explains,

[The Steering Panel] goes around and tells them how much they will get if they decide to move from their little houses or whatever they're living in. And that's why so many of the people that live in the little houses are anxious to go. Because it will be money in their pocket. And, they think there will be a better start. But, I don't think so. [Name] has told them how much they will get before he knows. So I think a lot of them are misguided there.

Another respondent added,

How come nobody wanted to move until the money issue came up? Before that nobody wanted to move. The dollar sign makes the world go around. This is a bunch of bull! It's a money grab and a few are going to get rich on the deal. The money is going to make the people vote. If you show them the dollar signs they'll vote.

Thus, residents opposed to the buyout/relocation are upset that the Steering Panel has attracted residents with discussions of money. Members of Speak Out are angry with the Steering Panel because they feel they are deceiving Picher's citizens. According to one respondent, "Some people here [think] that they're gonna receive one hundred thousand for an old shack that ain't worth two thousand." The same respondent explains that he investigated the issue after hearing the rumor. He explained,

I went to rural development and asked them about it [money for property] and they said they would have to handle it, but people wouldn't get a lot of money. They would be paid according to what their house appraised and then they would have to borrow money to build a new house if they wanted.

The respondent then added, "If there is a buyout, if it ever happens, a lot of people are going to the poor farm." Another respondent expresses her frustration at the financial rumor. She explains,

I think [name] started the whole thing with [name] and whoever, the [name] guy and went around telling little old people, 'Hey, what do you think about this? They say they are supposed to get so much for a house and da, da, da.' ...[Name] was telling them how much they were going to make. They all got their eyes on 'We're gonna get so much' and what they was going to get and we can get out of here. That's why they're for it.

#### Framing Issues in Support of Staying Home

As indicated in the previous discussion, the Steering Panel has greater access to resources and political connections. The Speak Out group formed largely as a countermovement organization to challenge the efforts of the existing Steering Panel. Speak Out and those citizens who support keeping Picher in its current location are promoting their agenda through a series of carefully constructed arguments, or "frames."

Speak Out's arguments are centered around a simple solution of the problem directed at keeping Picher in its current location. They counter the Steering Panel's environmental concern by downplaying the health hazards. Specifically, they put a positive spin on Picher's chat piles by emphasizing their aesthetic quality. Also, they emphasize the strong degree of "Picher Pride" that is embedded in the community. They also emphasize the importance of "Private rights" (the right to remain on their land) and portray themselves as "the underdogs" compared to the larger, and politically connected Steering Panel. Finally, an important part of their argument centers around anti-wetlands sentiment.

Chat Piles: Recreation, Aesthetic Qualities, and Childhood Memories. Although some members and supporters of Speak Out have stated that there "may" be some health issues in Picher, most downplay these issues, or even point to other causes for the problems (e.g., lead paint). Those respondents that did acknowledge some concern were not convinced these issues were serious. Instead, they frame the chat piles as beautiful landmarks in Picher. One resident states, "We use to sell Tee-shirts that read, 'Ski the Picher Mountains.' The chat piles were fun to ski down when the snow was on."

Another resident stated,

Everybody played on the chat piles when we were growing up. You can still see where four wheelers drive around on them. Cars used to drive over and jump some of the smaller [chat] piles. It's just been a normal thing to do, play on the chat piles. There just wasn't any concern about contamination...

During research visits to Picher I discovered vehicle tracks and footprints on the chat piles, indicating that residents were ignoring the posted danger signs situated around the chat pile sites. In addition, it was evident that residents had trespassed beyond the fences

that had been erected by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to keep individuals off the chat piles located on Indian properties.

A respondent discusses the aesthetic qualities attached to the chat piles stating, “I think the chat piles are pretty. A lot of people don’t. I mean they really look different to them. Everybody in the country has something that you notice and these are our chat piles.” Another respondent stated, “I think they are beautiful.”

Community Pride and Historical Significance. Many respondents framed their opposition to relocation based on perceptions of their longtime attachment to community. There is a strong sense of community pride among many residents. One respondent explains, “My mother and daddy moved here in 1919 and they never had no problems. I’ve lived here all my life and I have never had no problems.” Accordingly, this resident is a second generation “Picherite” and sees no reason for leaving. She added, “There is nothing wrong with Picher!” Another respondent speaking about a lifetime of hard work and investment in the Picher community stated,

...the people that’s built their homes and raised their kids and lived here all of our lives. We worked hard for what little we do have and we don’t want to have to sell and our kids go different directions and our sisters and brothers, all that. We have been here and our lead levels are not high and our kids are not high. I worked in a lead plant and they checked our lead levels every month and we got a bonus if our levels were low. Mine was always low.

Residents opposing the move are not interested in rumors about high prices for their property. One respondent voiced opposition to relocating regardless of the price offered, stating, “I’m not going to move. I love it here! I don’t think they’re going to pay us near what we’ve spent our life on. I’m happy here. I love it here. My family is here.

My church is here. My sisters live here.”

When a recent Picher segment aired on ABC's *Nightline* (March 1, 2002), the first statement used by a Picher resident was “Welcome to Hell!” This comment was made by one of the leaders of the Steering Panel. He defended the statement by claiming, “It was taken out of context.” Supporters of Speak Out voiced their disbelief, and anger toward someone making this type of statement concerning their community. Discussing the comment made on *Nightline*, one respondent stated, “I nearly fell out of my chair. It took everybody really back. That hurt [name]. People that were ready to move are even mad.”

Many Picher residents have a strong sense of community pride and do not want to see their homes destroyed or the city of Picher relocated. For them, Picher represents their family history, their childhood memories, and their hopes for the future. The sense of community that they now feel will be completely destroyed if they are forced out of the area. To them, modest concerns over environmental conditions pale in comparison to these losses.

Personal Rights and the Protection of Individual Freedoms. Picher residents also framed their arguments against relocation in the form of personal rights and freedoms. They feel it is their right to remain on their land. One resident discussed his thoughts and related the reaction that one of his neighbors has taken in response to a possible relocation,

I don't think they ought to force the people to move off. They've spent around a 100 million [dollars] on these yards. I think they ought to just let the people live here if they want to and if they want to move they can move. They may have to eventually move if the infrastructure in towns like Picher gets so bad that they

can't provide water and sewer. It may come down to people are forced to move. One of our neighbors has gone down to Wyandotte and bought two acres of ground down there just in case. [He said] "I'm not gonna move. I like living here, but I'm gonna be prepared just in case." He's one of all of us.

Speak Out supporters believe they are being "pushed around" by the more powerful and politically connected Steering Panel. They are prepared for the battle. A respondent compared the battle against the Steering Panel and their supporters to David versus Goliath. He states,

I told him [Speak Out leader] when I went on it [Speak Out] I felt it was like David and Goliath. There wouldn't be much we could do to stop [them]. They [Steering Panel] were going from the top. [Name] used to work in Washington and that's where he knew how to get a hold of a lot of people. So he gets with [name] and the [name] guy. And they're the ones just really wanting it to go.

Supporters of Speak Out want their voices to be heard, and feel that they have basic rights that will be violated if the community is moved. A respondent explains,

I believe that the people who don't want to move have a right to be heard. I don't believe relocation has to be done. I don't want this to come down to an election. We didn't have an election to see whether or not I wanted to live here in the first place and I sure don't want to have one to see if we move. I disagree with a vote. Fifty one percent of a mob can rule but that doesn't make it right. I don't think fifty one percent of the people should be able to tell you to sell our property. That's what it would amount too. When over one quarter of the population wants to stay you can't consider that a success when you're talking about relocation. It's like a jury. If one person out of twelve decides that the guy's not guilty you can't convict him. No matter what the other eleven decide, that one guy decides he isn't guilty.

Anti-Wetland Sentiment. Finally, Speak Out supporters are framing part of their general position through a critique of the proposed wetlands concept. A world class wetlands is being proposed by the Governor of Oklahoma for the Tar Creek Basin, and this issue is being supported by many residents supporting the federal buyout/relocation



plan. Thus, the area now known as Picher could conceivably become a large wetland area. Supporters for Speak Out are obviously opposed to the wetland idea, and make criticizing it a central theme in their discussions. They offer a variety of criticisms.

According to one respondent,

I've done a little studying on that and I've seen the map on their proposed "world class wetlands" they call it. I don't see how it can work. I don't see anything good about that because Governor Keating says it will bring people in and we'll have more wildlife. Big wetlands with a lot of prairie grass. But they can't tell me how many years it will take to purify water that would be contaminated that they will put in here. And another thing there's hundreds of mine shafts that haven't been plugged. There are drill holes that go all the way through the Roubidoux aquifer. The mines were all in the Boone aquifer. And they don't know where all of those are. Eagle-Picher drilled a bunch of deep holes hunting lead before they quit. I said if you put water over this area, over those drill holes and mineshafts, what's that going to do to the Roubidoux? In a few years there won't be a Miami.

Several advantages were discussed as part of the governor's wetlands proposal and among them were the establishment of a "hunter's paradise," and tourism in the future. One respondent opposed to moving addressed these claims,

I think it would be a fine deal if I was a duck hunter. It's going to cause problems for Commerce because water flows downhill and Commerce is south of here. It's gonna go south. There is a big hole. You are on top of water right now. It's probably only fifty feet below you. They say this water around here isn't fit for human consumption. If they make it a wetlands, what is it going to do to ducks and stuff? They could kick that stuff up and carry it south with them. This would just be a stopover for them. You've got eighty or ninety years of mining under here.

Hence, supporters of Speak Out believe that the existing environmental conditions in Picher will only be made worse if the area is turned into a wetlands. According to one respondent, "I'm against the wetlands. If they make the wetlands, somewhere down the line there's going to a mosquito spawning ground. That's just swapping one problem for another." Another respondent stated, "They want to move the town so they won't have

to move the chat piles because that's too expensive they say. If they leave the chat piles here, and they flood it, what are they gonna have? You are gonna have a big wetlands full of polluted water."

A Speak Out supporter summarizes some of his major concerns with the wetlands idea, as well as with the way Picher residents are being treated. According to the respondent, "For the governor to just want to take and say, 'You guys can get off of that place and you'll get whatever the government gives you,' and 'It's for your own good' and say 'We'll just make it a world class wetlands. That's what's best and cheapest.' " The respondent links the wetlands concept and economic considerations to basic rights and freedoms, and the sense of community. The respondent continues stating, "I don't go for that. You can't take and put a price tag on somebody's home. Makes us feel like we're being thrown away."

### Conclusion

I have presented an analysis of an ongoing environmental debate that has been waged for nearly two years among residents in Picher, Oklahoma. The environmental issues at the center of the argument have existed there for several decades, and will likely continue for years to come. Approximately one hundred million dollars have already been spent on cleanup efforts, and environmental problems remain.

This environmental controversy has divided the small town of Picher into two distinct factions: those who wish to relocate and those who wish to be left alone. I have described some of the issues involved on both sides. While members of the Steering Panel see serious environmental problems as a reason for a relocation/buyout, their counterparts,

Speak Out, downplay the significance of the problems. They prefer to remain in Picher.

They identify Picher as the place of their familial heritage and childhood memories.

In the next section, I summarize the major findings of the research and discuss the project's significance. Central to those issues is the fact that one side sees the remaining waste from earlier mining operations as being environmentally unsound while the opposition views the waste as a part of the town's history.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The city of Picher, Oklahoma has suffered from serious environmental problems for the past eight decades, dating back to the early mining days 1914-1970. The entire community has been placed on the Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund list, officially marking it as one of America's most contaminated sites. For several decades citizens living in the area were unaware of the hazards and the potential harm it was causing. The recent discovery of health issues related to the mining waste, chat, has prodded several agencies into action. The Environmental Protection Agency, along with various state agencies have attempted to remediate the lead contaminated residential properties, but nearly all residents believe these efforts have failed miserably. The environmental controversy has divided the community. Citizens have organized their efforts around their respective positions on the future of Picher. In this section I outline the findings from the research and discuss the contributions of the study.

In this research I have addressed two related research questions. First, how do residents with the same material environmental conditions come to interpret these issues in such divergent ways? Second, how do residents confronting the same environmental conditions organize their efforts and articulate divergent positions and solutions to the issues? The community faces the same environmental conditions, but they have been

interpreted in conflicting ways. One group of residents views the environmental conditions as being a very serious threat to the health and wellbeing of Picher's citizens. They support moving the entire community, either through a federal buyout or relocation. They have organized their efforts through the Tar Creek Basin Steering Panel. The Steering Panel has political allies through state agencies, including the Governor of Oklahoma. This faction of the community frames its arguments primarily around health and environmental concerns. Steering Panel members view the surrounding environment as harmful and argue that the town is unsafe for residents, especially for small children who are more susceptible to environmental contaminants. Steering Panel supporters also argue that the area is increasingly susceptible to cave-ins, which can lead to serious and harmful accidents. The Steering Panel argues that the U.S. Government is responsible for the environmental issues facing the area since they failed to regulate mining operations in the past.

One of the solutions the Steering Panel supports is turning the entire area into a world class wetlands. There are several reasons for the wetland rationale. First, the Governor of Oklahoma is backing the wetland concept and the Steering Panel has a powerful ally with his support. Second, a wetlands could potentially serve as an environmental filter which, over time, could actually "clean" Picher's environment. Some members assert that the wetlands would also address concerns regarding cave-ins.

Those citizens opposing the Steering Panel have organized their efforts through Speak Out. They argue that there is no need to relocate the community. Speak Out members have framed the environmental and health concerns as less serious. Instead, they

emphasize the importance of Picher pride and community solidarity. Speak Out and its supporters argue that financial issues are motivating their opponents, the Steering Panel. Speak Out argues that the Steering Panel is taking advantage of community residents by leading them to believe a federal buyout would bring high prices for their property, which is currently worth very little. Speak Out also opposes turning the area into a wetlands. Ultimately, they support keeping the city intact, and they emphasize the importance of preserving the community in its present location.

This research contributes to our understanding of environmental controversies in various communities. Following Krogman (1996), I have identified an environmental controversy in which the community is divided into competing factions. While most environmental controversies pit concerned citizens against business owners and/or environmental regulators, the case of Picher, Oklahoma is unique in that the residents themselves are split into two factions. One group, the Tar Creek Steering Panel, is actively campaigning for state and federal aid to assist in moving the town either through buyout or relocation. The opposing group, Speak Out, has recently begun an active campaign to thwart Steering Panel efforts and keep Picher in its present location. This situation has turned some former friends and neighbors into adversaries.

The findings from this research have important implications for other grassroots environmental conflicts. The importance of community pride must be taken into consideration when examining citizen responses, especially in the small town atmosphere. In this case, the debate over environmental concerns is tied to community pride. In the existing literature on grassroots environmental conflicts, the importance of community

pride is not sufficiently addressed. This study indicates that environmental concerns may, at least in some cases, be minimized by broader concerns related to historical significance and community.

This study has implications for social movement theory. While the framing perspective provides an important theoretical framework for studying phenomena at a single point in time, it proved much less useful for understanding the broader historical significance of the Picher community. In this context, framing proved to be somewhat ahistorical. Accordingly, analysts need to examine the importance of historical context in framing practices. Framing also tends to ignore important issues related to power. The ability of one group to successfully frame issues is directly linked to power and political networks. Thus, future work should attempt to integrate issues of power in framing struggles. Finally, while this study explored framing activity by focusing solely on the local level, it is clear that future analyses should factor in the broader political environment. Future research needs to examine how activities at the state and national levels influence framing processes at the local level.

This study also raises issues related to the perceptions of risk within a small community. Community residents are forced to rely on “outside experts” for much of their information regarding environmental concerns, and several factors may account for how conflicting perceptions emerge. This study illustrates how a community can be diametrically opposed over issues related to risk perception. Supporters of the Steering Panel perceive very serious risk and health concerns, which becomes their basis for the relocation campaign. The opposing group, Speak Out, sees only minimal risk in the area.

These differences may be related to access to information, education, technical expertise, or even to perceived differences related to financial incentives. This study also highlights the controversy between environmental concerns versus personal rights. If the Steering Panel is successful in its efforts to have the community relocated, the opposition, those supporting Speak Out, will feel their basic rights as U.S. citizens will have been compromised. Thus, future analysis of grassroots environmental conflicts should take various issues into account within the community context when attempting to understand the dynamics of local environmental conflicts.



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## **APPENDIX A**

## **Interview Guide Picher, Oklahoma**

### **I. Basic Information**

1. Are you currently a resident of Picher?
2. How long have you lived here?
3. Do you work in Picher? If not, where?
4. Do you have children? Ages?

### **II. Environmental Concerns**

1. Are you concerned with the environment here in Picher? Explain.
2. How long have you been concerned?
3. What is your experience with the contamination? (e.g., contaminated lawn, proximity to chat piles, etc.).
4. Do you remember how you found out about the potential risks posed by the environment in Picher?

### **III. Health Concerns**

1. Do you think the environmental conditions are affecting residents' health? Explain.
2. Do you think your health has been affected?
3. Do you think the health of your family has been affected?
4. How serious do you think the health and environment issues are here in town?

### **IV. Cleanup efforts**

1. What do you think about the attempts to clean up the area? Successful?
2. In general, how do you feel about the government's handling the clean up? Has it been more than just cosmetic? Explain.
3. What are your thoughts on the Environmental Protection Agency? Superfund? Have their efforts been effective?

### **V. Community residents' Views and Perceptions (Framing the Issues)**

1. Who do you think is responsible for the current situation in Picher? Explain.  
  
What do you think should be done about the situation? Explain.



- a. Where do you stand on the wetlands issue?
  - b. Should the community be moved?
  - c. Should Picher remain and other solutions found?
2. Why do you think there is disagreement in the community? Explain differences opinion among Picher's residents.

#### **VI. Social Movement Activity**

1. Are you involved in any citizen organization or group related to environmental problems encountered in Picher?
2. If yes, what is the group or organization?
  - a. Discuss the group's agenda-What is it trying to do? How big is the group?
  - b. When did the group begin?
  - c. How and why did you get involved?
  - d. What kinds of activities is the group involved in?
  - e. Does your organization have any funding? Explain sources.
  - f. Networking: Is your group connected with other groups? Explain.
  - g. How closely does this organization reflect your own ideas about what should be done?
  - h. Are you and your organization actively involved in recruiting new members? How?
  - i. In general, what have these organizations accomplished?
  - j. Is your organization working (cooperating) with other government agencies? Explain

Are there other organizations/groups that oppose your own?

  - a. If so, what competing organization(s)?
  - b. How do their ideas about Picher differ from your own?
  - c. Do you know how many people are involved with that/those organizations?

3. Has local government been receptive to your organizational ideology concerning Picher? Explain.
4. Has the federal government (and EPA) been receptive to your organizing in Picher? Explain.

#### **VII. General Background Information**

1. Age?
2. Sex?

3. Race?
4. Highest level of education?
5. Marital status?
6. Children? How many?
7. Current occupation?
8. Which of these annual income categories fits your household (you don't have to answer this if you are uncomfortable doing so).
  - Category A: below \$15,000
  - Category B: \$15,000-\$30,000
  - Category C: \$30,000-\$50,000
  - Category D: \$50,000-\$75,000
  - Category E: over \$75,000

## **APPENDIX B**

## Informed Consent To Participate in Study

Dennis Kennedy  
Oklahoma State University  
Department of Sociology  
(405) 744-6121

I have been asked to participate in a research project conducted by Dennis Kennedy and supervised by Dr. Tom Shriver of the Department of Sociology at Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the environmental problems in Picher, Oklahoma. As a participant in this research project, I will be asked to complete an interview that will last between one and two hours. I will be asked to answer questions regarding my overall knowledge and perceptions concerning the situation in Picher.

I understand that no one will be able to connect my name or any other type of personal identification with the information I provide during the interview. The information that I furnish will remain anonymous. I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusing to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without any penalty by notifying Dennis Kennedy at (918) 642-5656 or Dr. Tom Shriver at (405) 744-6121.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I am currently eighteen years or older. I understand that this signed consent form will be filed separately from any and all interview correspondence and this is the only place my name will ever appear. I sign my name freely and acknowledge that a copy of this consent has been given to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name (please print clearly)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject or his/her representative before requesting the subject or his/her representative to sign it.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

## **APPENDIX C**

**Oklahoma State University  
Institutional Review Board**

Protocol Expires: 2/28/03

Date: Friday, March 01, 2002

IRB Application No AS0247

Proposal Title: GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN THE TAR  
CREEK BASIN: THE CASE OF PICHER, OKLAHOMA

Principal Investigator(s):	Dennis Kennedy 006 CLB Stillwater, Ok 7407	Thomas Shriver 006 CLB Stillwater, Ok 74078
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Reviewed and  
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by reviewers(s): Approved

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Dear PI:

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgement of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modification to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair  
Institutional Review Board

VITA 2

Dennis K. Kennedy

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM IN THE TAR CREEK  
BASIN: THE CASE OF PICHER, OKLAHOMA

Major Field: Sociology

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Wichita Falls, Texas, on May 21, 1952, the son of  
Clarence and Irviline Kennedy.

Education: Attended Ralston Public Schools eleven years and obtained a GED in  
August 1970; received a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Sociology from  
Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May 1999. Completed  
the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Sociology  
at Oklahoma State University in August 2002.

Experience: Raised in rural Oklahoma; seven years military experience; twenty  
years oilfield and petroleum related hazardous waste remediation; employed  
by Oklahoma State University, Department of Sociology, as a graduate  
teaching and research assistant, 1999-2001.

Professional memberships: American Sociological Association, Rural  
Sociological Association; Alpha Kappa Delta.