



First Nations Health Authority  
Health through wellness

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## Mount Polley Mine Communiqué

August 6, 2014

The First Nations Health Authority is supporting the human health concerns of First Nations affected by the Mount Polley Mine tailings pond spill. On Monday August 4 at 1:10 a.m. the tailings dam was breached, releasing water/tailings and ground rock. Water and debris flowed into Polley Lake, then into Hazeltine Creek and then to Quesnel Lake. Mount Polley mine is an open-pit gold/copper mine located 8km southwest of Likely and 56 km Northeast of Williams Lake BC. The MPM is located within the northern part of the Secwepemc te Qelmucw (NStQ) traditional territory and is within the traditional territories of T'exelc Williams Lake Indian Band and the Xat'sull Soda Creek First Nations. Cariboo Regional District is the lead agency in responding to the emergency.

Based on concerns of impacts to drinking water supplies, the Cariboo Regional District issued a Do Not Use advisory for the immediate area of the spill, for both drinking and recreational use. At this time the First Nations drinking water systems are not in the vicinity of the spill area and therefore are not at risk of contamination.

The Ministry of Environment conducted tests on the water from the tailings pond and in Quesnel Lake on Monday August 4th. Direct observation and on-site testing within Quesnel Lake showed that field measurements were within normal limits, and there was no observable fish kill. Turbidity was elevated which is to be expected. Results from chemical analysis are anticipated on Thursday August 7<sup>th</sup>.

The results of chemical testing will inform how follow-up testing is conducted to verify immediate and long-term health impacts and what chemicals need to be monitored on an ongoing basis. FNHA will work in partnership with Nations in the affected areas to support independent water testing.

The spill coincides with the Fraser River sockeye run and has created concern about the safety of food fish.

The FNHA will be liaising with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) and BC Ministry of Environment to understand both the short and long term potential effects on fish stocks. At this time, fish advisories have been issued for portions of the Cariboo and Quesnel rivers.

FNHA recognizes that there is an important connection between the environmental impacts of this incident and the spiritual, emotional and mental well-being of community members.

Secwepemc First Nations will be gathering at the Likely Bridge tomorrow at noon to conduct a ceremony to recognize the spiritual impact of the incident.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Is it safe to fish?**

DFO has issued a fishing ban in portions of the Cariboo and Quesnel rivers. At this time, no fish advisories have been issued for the Fraser River. FNHA is verifying with DFO and BC Ministry of Environment if any short-term or long-term impacts are expected.

### **What about effects on plants?**

Vegetation along Hazeltine Creek into Quesnel Lake and Polley Lake may be impacted as this was the location of most of the turbulence which may have splashed tailings onto surrounding plant life. These areas should be avoided for plant collection.

### **How quickly is the effluent moving through the lake and river systems?**

FNHA is in contact with BC Ministry of Environment to obtain information on the movement of the effluent within the Fraser River system. We will provide information as it becomes available. It is important to note that the Fraser River provides significant dilution, therefore greatest levels and impact are in the area closest to the spill site.

### **Is the water safe on our skin?**

Cariboo Regional District issued a Do Not Use advisory which includes contact with skin, however this applies to areas only in the direct vicinity of the spill and include: Quesnel Lake, Polley Lake, Hazeltine Creek and Cariboo Creek.

### **Where did the Ministry of Environment conduct its testing?**

MOE reports that sites within the direct area of the spill were tested, including Quesnel Lake. Additional testing will be done at other sites when it is safe to do so.

### **Will the FNHA carry out its own water or fish testing?**

FNHA is awaiting information on the tailings pond chemical content and the results of initial MOE lab results to inform monitoring programs. The results of chemical testing will inform how follow-up testing is conducted to verify immediate and long-term health impacts and what chemicals need to be monitored on an ongoing basis. FNHA will work in partnership with Nations in the affected areas to support independent water testing.