



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness



First Nations
Health Council

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Ceremony Marks Beginning of Healing Journey at Mount Polley Site

Secwepemc te Qelmuw Territory- The First Nations Health Council (FNHC) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) are deeply concerned about the environmental and human health effects of the Mount Polley Mine disaster. The spill coincides with the Fraser River sockeye run and has created concern about the safety of food fish.

“It’s difficult to express the depth of our connection to these lands, and the pain and sorrow that have resulted from this man- made disaster. We don’t separate human health from our relatives, the water and the animals. We are connected as “One”. Yesterday’s ceremony marks our sacred duty to speak for those that cannot speak for themselves.” Kukpi7 Wayne Christian, First Nations Health Council.

A sacred ceremony held yesterday at the site of the spill marked the beginning of the healing journey.

“It was an honour to witness the ceremony today and see the strength of First Nations culture and tradition as a way forward in the healing process. The ceremony was a means for the local First Nations peoples to recognize the community of Likely and confirm their intentions to walk side by side with them through this crisis and to collectively pray for the health of the land, water, plants and animals.”
Joe Gallagher, Chief Executive Officer, FNHA

The 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.

“We are deeply saddened by this tragedy. The negative impact on the lands and resources directly affects the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellbeing of First Nations peoples, who have occupied these territories since time immemorial. As a health and wellness partner, we are working to ensure that the necessary services are in place to support the holistic health of these communities.”
Dr. Shannon Waters, Acting Senior Medical Health Officer

The FNHA is taking the following steps to address all dimensions of health and wellness within its mandate including: Supporting independent water testing program for affected First Nations, providing mental health and spiritual wellness supports, and coordinating the First Nations public health response with the broader health system. FNHA continues to participate in situation updates in order to relay the concerns of First Nations, and to address any public health considerations.

The FNHA will be liaising with the First Nations Health Council (FNHC), 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 Quenel rivers. The Fraser River is not under advisory.

“The job of the FNHC is to advocate on all matters relating to health. Clearly the recent tragic events at Mount Polley provide a significant threat to the water, fishery and people living in and around Mount Polley. I am pleased that the FNHA is acting quickly to work with First Nations and carry out independent testing to address fears around water quality and food safety. As chair of FNHC I will be working with Kukpi7 Wayne Christian and others bringing issues related to breach of the tailing pond to deputy ministers I work with both federally and provincially.” Grand Chief Doug Kelly, Chair, First Nations Health Council.

The Mount Polley Mine is located within the northern part of the Secwepemc te Qelmuw (NStQ) traditional territory and is within the traditional territories of T'exelc Williams Lake Indian Band and the Xat'sull Soda Creek First Nations.

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Learn more:

<http://www.fnha.ca/about/news-and-events>

For more information contact: Davis McKenzie | Communications | 604. 693.6509

Additional information from Ministry of Environment can be located:

<http://www.gov.bc.ca/env/>

<http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/eemp/incidents/2014/mount-polley.htm>