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MiningWatch Canada/Mines Alerte

Suite 508, City Centre Building, 880 Wellington St., Ottawa, Ontario K1R 6K7 Canada
tel. (613) 569-3439 — fax: (613) 569-5138 — e-mail: canada@miningwatch.ca — url: www.miningwatch.ca

Newsletter

Number 4: Autumn 2000

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Community monitoring in the Yukon

The MiningWatch Canada small grants fund paid for sampling expenses for the Yukon Conservation Society and Carmacks community members to conduct field investigations and analyse samples at the closed Mt. Nansen mine in the Yukon. The company is now bankrupt and the federal government is responsible for the clean-up.

"We were worried about the health of the fish and wildlife in the area, so we sampled the water ourselves," said MiningWatch board member, Sarah Johnnie.

The results of the testing showed unacceptable levels of contaminants a few kilometres downstream of the mine. Cyanide levels in water were ten times higher than CCME

guidelines, and arsenic levels in sediments at the same place were five times higher. Other metals such as copper, lead, aluminum, and iron were also higher than they should be.

There is on-going concern that the dam — built on permafrost — is not stable. If the dam breaks or slumps, the toxins will flow through Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation Territory into Champagne-Ashihik First Nation Territory and to the main stem of the Yukon River.

The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) has refused to comment on the situation. In late October, Johnnie and others will be coming to Ottawa to talk to them.

Kenyans tour to raise awareness of Tiomin's strip-mining plans for titanium

In mid-October two Kenyan human rights lawyers, Willy Matunga and Haron Ndubi, toured Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa to raise awareness about plans for a disastrous mine in southern Kenya. They visited NGOs and community groups, as well as representatives of the proponent, Tiomin Resources Inc., the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), and Natural Resources Canada (NRCan).

Tiomin Resources Inc., a Toronto-based mining company listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange, is expecting to

strip-mine for titanium in the sands of Kenya's Kwale District starting early in the year 2001. Titanium is a light weight metal used in bicycle manufacture, aeronautics, etc. and as a whitener for paint, plastic, and paper.

CIDA INC paid \$400,000 for the company's Environmental Impact Study (EIS). Scientists from Kenyatta University, in conjunction with the non-governmental organisation ActionAid Kenya, produced an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that raised a number of concerns not mentioned in the environmental study done for Tiomin. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) has also severely criti-

cised the EIS.

Much of the land in Tiomin's 64 km² concession will be strip-mined, exposing mineral deposits up to 40 metres in depth. In addition, damage will be caused by timbering, constructing roads, processing, a power-generating plant, power lines, and waste piles.

Over 450 Digo and Kamba agricultural families will be displaced and plants, trees, soil, houses, schools, and markets will be destroyed. Although the company plans to return the land to its owners after 21 years, some of Kenya's best farmland will no longer be arable due to changes in soil structure. Kenyans feel that relocation and rental fees offered by Tiomin, \$120 per acre and \$30 per acre respectively, are completely inadequate compensation for these large extended

families who will lose not only their homes, but their communities and livelihoods.

Women and children are at greatest risk of suffering. Said one boy from the community: "Maybe after moving we shall become street children."

The mineral deposits are associated with 309 ppm of uranium and 143 ppm of thorium, radioactive elements that have the potential to harm human health and the environment once exposed to the air. Kenyan scientists are concerned about sulphur dioxide emissions from the combustion of diesel fuels in the mining plants, and that water use will exert pressure on water sources and damage aquifers. They also fear that a deep sea port at Shimon, as proposed by the company, will also damage pristine coral reefs.

New mining effluent regulations to be gazetted this fall

The revisions to the Metal Mining Liquid Effluent Regulations (MMLER) will be published this fall, probably in November. There will be a 60 day comment period before they become law.

The regulations provide exemptions for the mining industry from Section 36 of the Fisheries Act. That section of the Act says it is illegal to put "deleterious substances in water frequented by fish." The MMLER sets allowable limits for toxics like arsenic, and for total suspended solids.

At present, the regulations do not include mercury, cyanide or cadmium. Although this should mean that they cannot be dumped in water, in fact this has not been enforced.

Although we have not seen the revised regulations, we understand that they will set allowable limits for cyanide, tighten the limits for total suspended solids and define an "acutely lethal effluent" level. That is, if more than 50% of rainbow trout placed in a sample of the effluent die within 24 hours, then it would be in violation. There will also be provision for Environmental Effects Monitoring at sites.

The MMLER revisions have come about after more than seven years of multi-stakeholder negotiations. They aren't good enough. We are hoping that public response will convince Environment Canada to honour Canadians' wishes, and protect our waters from further degradation.

International workshop video released: "Our Stories Belong to That Mountain"

We successfully launched the video and report from this April's "On the Ground Research" workshop at a public event on September 14. Over seventy people attended the event, which was held at the International Development Research Centre. Roger Moody, in town to present his research report on mining in Burma, spoke about organising to protect the rights of communities affected by large-scale mining. Copies of the video (in English) and the report (in Spanish or English) can be obtained from MiningWatch Canada.

Peter Yeboah (left), of WACAM (Wassa Area Communities Affected by Mining), and William Appiah of the Third World Network's Africa Secretariat, both from Ghana, were two of the international delegates at the workshop. William is also part of the project's organising committee.



Sudbury Falconbridge workers out on strike since August 1

Scabs and management are keeping the nickel mines and smelter operating at Falconbridge Nickel Mines in Sudbury, Ontario. The Union (MineMill Local 598 of the Canadian Auto Workers) has been out on strike since August 1, protesting contracting out, wage rollbacks and other measures that will "gut the collective agreement" if implemented.

The strikers suspect the company's intransigence is a re-

sult of the recent purchase of 49.9% of Falconbridge by Noranda Inc., and the desire of Noranda to bring the Sudbury operation closer to the level of costs in their operations in Peru, Chile and other parts of the world.

Community solidarity with the strikers is strong, and growing.

Victory against plans to dump Toronto garbage in abandoned Adams mine!

With First Nations, angry residents of north Eastern Ontario, and environmentally conscious people around the world, Brennain Lloyd of Northwatch (our co-chair) is claiming victory in the struggle to stop the plans to ship Toronto's garbage 600 kilometres north by rail and dump it in an abandoned Kirkland Lake mine. Toronto cancelled the contract at the last minute, after having pushed it through city council.

Carol McBride, chief of the Temiskaming First Nation, had said that with Toronto's council approval of the plan, she expected a wave of civil disobedience by northern Ontarians. "When we talk about the idea that this will make Oka look like a picnic, it is because not only are First Na-

tions involved, but so are all northerners," she said.

Protest over the garbage plan has been brewing for months. In early October, demonstrators formed a human blockade that prevented access to the rail line leading to the mine dump site. Members of the Temiskaming First Nation briefly blockaded the railway tracks near Earlton, and the area's MPP said people are bracing for an Oka-like standoff.

Toronto's garbage will now be sent to existing landfills in Michigan, something Michigan legislators are powerless to prevent due to provisions in the North American Free Trade Agreement that treat garbage as a commodity. At least trash has become an issue in Toronto, and we may see the city become serious about recycling and waste diversion.

Work on cleaning up abandoned mines continues...

The urgency of abandoned mines' clean-up is becoming increasingly obvious to federal decision-makers. This summer, MiningWatch Canada has been working with the Mining Association of Canada (MAC) and officials at Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) to come up with a plan that will:

- Create a database and inventory of all mines (operating and closed) in the country, including physical and chemical site assessments;
- Develop a transparent and effective system for ranking hazards and the need for remediation at mines;
- Develop mechanisms for emergency response at sites;
- Develop a funding mechanism to recover the costs of abandoned mine reclamation, monitoring and care.

We do not expect easy agreement with MAC or NRCan on who pays for clean-up, since it is our position that industry should pay, one way or another. However, the issue of abandoned mines was highlighted by MAC, the Yukon Territorial Government and NRCan at the recent Mines Ministers conference in Toronto.

We are also part of the Green Budget Coalition, with the Canadian Nature Federation, CPAWS, the Sierra Club, the Pembina Institute, Ducks Unlimited, and others. Part of the Green Budget proposal is a "Clean Canada Fund" to set aside \$2 billion on a cost-recovery basis to begin the clean-up of toxic sites, including abandoned mines. The federal government has shown considerable interest in this proposal.

Action needed on abandoned mines: Regulations not working at Britannia

For the fourth time since purchasing one of the worst polluting mine sites in North America, Vancouver-based Copper Beach Estates Ltd. (CBEL) failed to meet a provincial government order to halt the flow of deadly toxins from the old Britannia mine.

The company says it has been unable to secure financing for a clean-up plan that would include building a wastewater treatment plant, and using the mine's open pits as a landfill site for contaminated soils and industrial wastes.

Since purchasing the property in 1979, CBEL has received four pollution abatement orders under BC's *Waste Management Act*. The latest clean-up order was issued in the fall of 1999 and expired August 31, 2000. At the time of its issuance, the Environmental Mining Council of BC (EMCBC) argued that the company's contaminated soils landfill idea was neither financially viable nor environmentally sound.

"The financing institutions or partners that CBEL has approached apparently reached a similar conclusion," said EMCBC executive director (and MiningWatch Canada co-chair) Alan Young. "It's time the provincial government

recognized that this so-called plan is going nowhere and did something to end the continued pollution at this site."

"The provincial and federal governments need to put a solution in place to stop tonnes of copper and zinc from flowing into Howe Sound again this winter and spring," said Karen Wristen, executive director of the Sierra Legal Defence Fund. "They need to either sue the companies who are responsible for this mess, or commit to a clean-up plan using public funds until the responsible parties are brought to justice."

The BC government has notified several large companies who earlier operated or owned the mine that they are potentially responsible for the clean-up at Britannia. The companies include ARCO, CanZinco and ArrowHead/Ivaco. None of the companies has accepted responsibility for the pollution or offered to assist in cleaning up the site.

Britannia is but one of more than 1,800 closed and abandoned mines in BC, and well over 10,000 abandoned mines in Canada. The impacts of many of these abandoned sites on fisheries and human health and safety are deadly serious. The clean-up of abandoned mines like Britannia

needs to be a top priority for both the federal and provincial governments who have neglected this serious problem for far too long.

There is a glimmer of hope on the horizon. At a recent meeting of provincial and federal Mines Ministers there was agreement on the need to set up a National Action Plan on

abandoned mines.

For more information on Britannia, or on the issue of abandoned mines, contact MiningWatch Canada or the Environmental Mining Council of BC (tel: (250) 384-2686; or e-mail <emcbc@miningwatch.org>).

"Sustainable Development" in the Canadian Government

In 1995, the federal government issued a "Guide to Green Government" and the *Auditor General Act* was amended to make sustainable development an integral part of federal policy. All 28 federal departments were asked to develop and table sustainable development strategies in accordance with the *Act*. The first three-year departmental sustainable development strategies were tabled in Parliament in 1997. The 1995 amendments also established the office of the Commissioner of Environment and Sustainable Development, whose rôle is to help Parliament and the Canadian public monitor implementation of sustainable development strategies and federal commitments to action.

All departments must update their sustainability strategies for the next three year period, and some are now holding public consultations. So far, we have focused on Environment Canada (EC) and Natural Resources Canada (NRCan), both of which have provided draft documents for public "consultation". Neither of these documents provides a definition of sustainable development as development that is essentially constrained by ecological boundaries. Neither, as a result, attempts to provide a baseline from which to measure whether our activities are becoming more or less sustainable. They do not address the question whether human ac-

tivity, "development," is still within the boundaries of global ecological health or whether we are already threatening the environment that sustains us. Both documents advance a model of "balance" between social, environmental and economic needs of present and future generations. This definition does not recognize the fact that balance based on perceived needs may lead to ecological collapse.

Both EC and NRCan seem to include in these documents much of what they are currently doing, without making a clear linkage to how these programs further sustainable development. Of particular concern in the NRCan document is the fact the department is using government money to fund research into the impacts of marine disposal of mine tailings, a project the industry strongly supports. Yet submarine tailings disposal contravenes the Metal Mining Liquid Effluent Regulations, threatens fish habitat, and contravenes Canada's Fisheries Act. On the other hand, Environment Canada's attempt to arrive at a "true value of Canada's natural capital: water, air, nature and wetlands" seems quite constructive. This project will certainly encourage debate about the economic value of healthy natural resources and may lead to a deeper debate about the value of healthy ecosystems for human health and survival.

Workshop on Women, Mining and the Environment held in Whitehorse

Gaining Ground: Women, Mining and the Environment was a two-day gathering held at Lake LaBerge, Yukon, September 15-17, 2000. It brought together women from Yukon communities affected by mining and women from elsewhere with experience in the health, science, and social science sectors. The gathering broke new ground in recognizing and understanding the impacts of mining on communities and families, as well as the interrelationship between women, mining, and the environment, and it set clear direc-

tions for moving forward.

The idea for the gathering grew out of the recognized absence of information about how the mining industry affects women and their families. By raising their voices and demanding to be heard, women can push the mining industry to evolve and to address the needs of women. The planning and environmental assessment stages of a mining project usually focus on technical and economic issues, while the project's effects on family health are seldom scrutinized.

Communications update:

The launch of Roger Moody's report on mining in Burma (in cooperation with Canadian Friends of Burma) was our biggest media effort of the last few months, but the only coverage it received was locally in the Yukon News. Interestingly, while Ivanhoe (the company implicated in the report) claimed that much of the report was false or inaccurate, they were unable to provide any actual information to support their claims.

Tiomin's proposal to mine titanium in Kenya without an adequate environmental impact assessment, and without proper negotiations with the affected communities, got good coverage in McLeans (October 2 issue), though MiningWatch was not mentioned as the source of much of their information.

Visit www.canada.miningwatch.ca to catch up on the latest.