
For Immediate Release | August 12, 2014

Mount Polley Mine Tailings Pond Breach – Fish Consumption Deemed Safe –

Following consultation and discussion with a number of agencies regarding the impacts of the Mount Polley Mine's tailings pond breach on the human health risks associated with eating fish, Interior Health's Medical Health Officer (MHO) has deemed all fish outside of the revised August 12 "Do Not Use" water advisory as safe for human consumption. Individuals should refrain from consuming fish from the remaining impact zone, which includes Polley Lake, Hazeltine Creek, and a small portion of Quesnel Lake that has a visible sediment plume.

"I recognize the important role fishing plays to local residents, First Nations community members, and visitors impacted by the Polley Mine spill and I wholeheartedly appreciate the concerns that are being expressed regarding safety," said Dr. Trevor Corneil, Medical Health Officer, IH. "I have consulted with numerous experts in this field, and I am reassured that the current fish living in these waterways, and those that may travel through it via the Fraser River or spawn in it are safe to consume."

The decision on fish consumption was made after review of water and sediment sample results, which show fish were not exposed to unsafe levels of contaminants from the mine breach. Fish testing currently underway continues to demonstrate no immediate harm to any local fish.

Prior to reaching this decision, Interior Health's MHO consulted extensively with officials from the Ministry of Environment (MoE) Water Quality Division, Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations (FLNRO) Fish and Wildlife, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), Cariboo Regional District (CRD), and Northern Health Authority (NHA) and engaged in discussions with the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA).

As a precautionary measure and as part of ongoing monitoring, the MoE will continue to conduct tissue sampling of a variety of fish species. At the request of First Nations communities, the FNHA will be resourcing salmon tissue sampling using an independent assessor to interpret and share results. In addition, the MoE, CRD, and IH are developing a longer-term sampling plan recognizing the potential for cumulative impact of certain contaminants on fish. Interior Health will continue to monitor these sample results from a human health risk perspective.

"The CRD is pleased to see these results, as well as the collaboration that has occurred through Interior Health and the joint-agency advisory group," says CRD Chair Al Richmond. "The protection and safety of fish and recreational fishing activities are important to residents and First Nations not only in the CRD area, but to residents in B.C. I am optimistic this direction from Dr. Corneil will assist in returning a sense of normalcy to our communities."

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