
FACTSHEET

For Immediate Release
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Ministry of Energy and Mines
Ministry of Environment

Thursday, Aug. 7 - Mount Polley tailings pond situation update

WILLIAMS LAKE – Government and Cariboo Regional District officials continue to work together to address the breach at the Mount Polley tailings pond, to test the local drinking water to determine if it is safe for locals to drink or bathe in, and to help ensure the safety and well-being of local residents.

This factsheet will be updated daily with the latest information available.

New today:

1. Imperial Mines met the Aug. 6 deadline requirements of the pollution abatement order to submit an Action Plan for the Preliminary Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and initiate environmental monitoring yesterday. Imperial Metals has provided, and will be initiating a plan to stop the flow from the Tailings Impoundment breach as required by item 1 of the PAO.
2. Save-On-Foods, in conjunction with the Canadian Red Cross, has donated 18,000, 500ml bottles of water and 1,440, four-litre bottles of water. This morning, these bottles were distributed to Likely residents in need.
3. Initial water sampling took place the evening of Aug. 4, and samples were sent for testing early Tuesday morning. Drinking water testing continues daily at multiple sites (yesterday was Quesnel Lake and River). The first set of results is expected later today. Until that point, the environmental impact of the contaminated water on the local watershed remains unknown.
4. Emergency Management BC has integrated staff with the Cariboo Regional District Emergency Operations Centre to support response and recovery. Government is providing resource specialists in the Likely area to support the Emergency Operations Centre in Williams Lake. This team is co-ordinating site-level Provincial response and recovery activities in co-operation with Imperial Metals, the party responsible for site management.
5. Fisheries and Oceans Canada has issued a precautionary closure on a portion of the Chinook salmon fishery until sample results have come in. See the notice here: http://www-ops2.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fns-sap/index-eng.cfm?pg=view_notice&DOC_ID=161980&ID=all
6. Good progress is being made by West Fraser to boom the debris in Quesnel Lake and prevent it from reaching the bridge. The most recent reports suggest that approximately 80% of it is contained in Mitchell Bay and will be forwarded to Fraser Mills haul-out site. This means that the Likely Bridge is no longer considered at-risk.
7. The Ministry of Transportation has two excavators stationed at the Likely Bridge to respond should this situation change and any significant accumulations of debris

threaten the bridge.

8. Ministry of Energy and Mines inspectors continue their investigation and are continuing with the interview process. Two additional investigators are on-site today to carry forward with interviews of mine staff and a review of all applicable documentation on the mine site.

Ministry of Environment conservation officers are independently investigating the breach. Conservation officers are Special Provincial Constables under the Police Act with a wide suite of powers associated with that designation. Although part of government, the Conservation Officer Service (COS) is unfettered in its investigations as the COS investigates and forwards recommendations for charges when warranted directly to provincial crown counsel.

Current situation:

- The flow out of the breach has decreased dramatically, but has not completely stopped. Imperial Metals continues to work to stop flow out of the pond.
- A small amount of tailings backed into the mouth of Polley Lake and the main slurry flow went down Hazeltine Creek where it meets Quesnel Lake. The slurry and a large debris pile appear to be stationary at this point. Hazeltine Creek was originally about four feet wide and is now up to 150 feet wide.
- The state of local emergency (SOLE) remains in place, giving the CRD exceptional powers in the interest of ensuring public safety, allowing it to better enable an equitable distribution of potable water to the residents of Likely.
- The cause of the breach is still unknown at this time. Ministry of Environment conservation officers are investigating the breach.
- Ministry of Energy and Mines mine inspectors are also investigating, two of whom have been monitoring the site by helicopter.
- Tug boats continue to work in the area to boom the debris in the water and excavators are on standby in the event they are needed as well. Significant progress has been made.
- In the meantime, the CRD emergency operations centre, in consultation with Interior Health, has issued a drinking water advisory not to drink, bathe or feed livestock drawn from the following waterways: Quesnel Lake, Polley Lake, Hazeltine Creek and Cariboo Creek. The entire Quesnel River system right up to the Fraser River is under a do-not-drink advisory. ****Note: boiling will not help****
- There have been no reports of injuries or people getting sick from drinking water. There have been no reports of property damage.
- The cost of the cleanup of the breach is the responsibility of Imperial Metals, and is not a cost borne by B.C. taxpayers.

Pollution abatement order:

On Aug. 6, the Ministry of Environment issued a Pollution Abatement Order to Mount Polley Mining Corp. This order requires immediate action to stop the further release of mine tailings into nearby waterways and to submit environmental impact assessments and clean-up action plans to the ministry.

It also required the company to submit a written summary of actions taken to stop the release of mine tailings and to undertake a preliminary environmental impact assessment and submit an action plan. This has now been done.

The company must also submit a detailed action plan by Aug. 15, and it is required to report weekly on the implementation of action plan measures.

Drinking water advisory:

The advisory does not apply to people in Williams Lake, Quesnel or other towns along the Fraser River. Fishing by First Nations along the Fraser is also not affected.

The Cariboo Regional District has organized delivery of water to Likely because the main supplier of bottled water in the area, a small grocery store, could not keep up with the demand. This work will be supplemented with the donation today from Save-On-Foods. Search and rescue, Save-On-Foods employees and Red Cross volunteers are all supporting water delivery efforts.

The Ministry of Environment will provide water-sampling results to Interior Health officials and the Cariboo Regional District Emergency Operations Centre as they become available. The ministry will continue to conduct water-sampling tests daily to determine the impacts on water quality and is also working with Imperial Metals to develop both short-term and long-term plans for further water-quality testing.

The ministry intends to post results on its website, including a map of the sampling locations.

Due to the influx of tourists in to the area over the long weekend, the number of people affected is unconfirmed but the CRD estimates it could range up to 300.

Regional infrastructure and waterways:

Waterways affected by this event include Quesnel Lake, Polley Lake, Hazeltine Creek and Cariboo Creek.

Additionally the Horsefly Likely Forest Service (Ditch Road) has been washed out at Hazeltine Creek and the Gavin Lake Forest Service Road was washed out closer to the dam breach area. The Likely Bridge is **not affected** at this time.

The mine's management, in consultation with Geotech consultants and government geotechnical engineers, is reviewing the situation at Polley Lake and at the tailings pond. They continue to consider alternatives to lower the water level in Polley Lake. These may include pumping the water into a historic empty pit on the site or pumping or diverting the water to the Hazeltine Creek.

As well, they are reviewing a plan to build a berm to prevent further tailings from flowing into Hazeltine Creek.

Previous site inspections:

The Mount Polley mine has a valid Mines Act permit and the company has been generally compliant with the Health, Safety and Reclamation Code and their Mines Act permit conditions.

The Ministry of Energy and Mines conducted a geotechnical inspection at the mine in September 2013, which resulted in no inspection orders related to the tailings facility.

Following reports of an overtopping of the tailings dam, Ministry of Energy and Mines officials

investigated an incident on May 24, 2014 and determined this was not a breach. It was an incident of when the height of the water within tailings pond was above the permitted requirements. This occurred in a different area of the facility than the Aug. 4 dam failure.

At the time of the May incident, the distance between the water elevation and the crest of the dam (freeboard) was less than one meter. The water returned to authorized levels and freeboard was approximately 2.4 meters when last measured on Aug. 3. Mine records show that the operation was carrying out visual dam inspections and measuring freeboard at an acceptable frequency.

Here is a list of recent advisories to Mount Polley from the Ministry of Environment, only one of which was related to height of the tailings pond. The Ministry of Environment is responsible to ensure no unauthorized effluent discharge from the tailings pond structure:

- May 24, 2014: The ministry issued an advisory to Mount Polley Mining Corporation for exceedance of the height of effluent within the tailings impoundment. The effluent level returned to authorized levels commencing June 30, 2014.
- April 18, 2014: The ministry issued an advisory to Mount Polley Mining Corporation for bypass of authorized treatment works. The site experienced high flows due to spring freshet which caused the pump system to become blocked and resulted in an overflow of effluent to the long ditch. Flow did not reach the creek and was directed into Till Borrow Pit.
- January and April 2012: The ministry issued an advisory to Mount Polley Mining Corporation for not submitting monitoring data for one of the groundwater monitoring wells.
- Aug. 30, 2012: The ministry issued a warning to Mount Polley Mining Corporation for failure to report exceedance of the height of effluent for the perimeter pond. This perimeter pond overflowed, releasing approximately 150 cubic metres of effluent over 13 hours to ground.

Additional background:

Early in the morning of Aug. 4 the tailings pond dam at the Mount Polley Mine site breached and released an estimated 10 million cubic metres of water and 4.5 million cubic metres of fine sand into Polley Lake. Hazeltine Creek flows out of Polley Lake and the flow of contaminated water continued into Quesnel Lake.

Preliminary monitoring data provided by the mine did not show any changes in the internal water pressure in the dam before the breach. The last readings were taken on Aug. 2, 2014. The investigation will evaluate all monitoring data before the breach.

The Mount Polley Mine is owned by Imperial Metals and is approximately 30 km from the community of Likely.

The tailing pond at Mount Polley Mine is four km by four km. This is a large breach and extremely rare.

Officials with the Ministry of Energy and Mines do not recall anything of this magnitude in at least the last 40 years.

For more information:

A public information line has been set up by the CRD: 250 398-5581

Updates will be posted to the Cariboo Regional District's emergency operations Facebook page, here: <http://www.facebook.com/CRDemergencyoperations> or on the CRD website at: <http://www.cariboord.ca/>

For a collection of documents from government and partners surrounding the Mount Polley breach, visit: <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/eemp/incidents/2014/mount-polley.htm>

To view yesterday's Situation Update, visit: http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2013-2017/2014MEM0020-001140.htm

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