

Question

Where are abandoned mines and contaminated sites located in Canada? How much will it cost to reclaim them and provide perpetual care for those sites that cannot be reclaimed?

Background

Abandoned mines and contaminated sites pose significant environmental and public health hazards, particularly in Northern Canada. In 2002, a report of the Canadian government's Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development identified 30 abandoned mine sites where the presence of toxins either required or may require remediation pending further assessment (Auditor General of Canada 2002). A wider-ranging consultant's report from the year 2000 suggested that there may be up to 10,000 abandoned mine sites in Canada, 160 of which are in the territorial north, with 67 of these sites exhibiting either chemical contamination or physical instability (Mackasey 2000). Many of these mines are likely located within aboriginal territories. One recent discussion paper, for example, indicates that roughly 1200 native communities in Canada are situated within 200km of active mines, with 36% of First Nations communities located within 50km of a mine (Hipwell et al. 2002). Many of these abandoned mine sites are public liabilities; the 2012 Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development report on contaminated sites in Canada listed two abandoned mines (Faro and Giant) amongst the top four most expensive contaminated sites in Canada.

Hipwell, William, Katy Mamen, Viviane Weitzner, and Gail Whiteman. *Aboriginal People and Mining in Canada: Consultation, Participation and Prospects for Change: Working Discussion Paper*. (Ottawa: North-South Institute, 2002)

Mackasey. W.O. "Abandoned Mines in Canada." Unpublished report prepared for MiningWatch Canada by WOM Geological Associates, Inc. (2000).

Office of the Auditor General of Canada. *Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, 2002*, chapter 3

Office of the Auditor General of Canada. *Report of the Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development, 2012*, chapter 3

The letter

15 October 2015

Cindy Blancher-Smith
Chair, National Orphan/Abandoned Mines Initiative
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Mines Ministers of Canada (federal, provincial, territorial)

Dear Ms. Blancher-Smith and Mines Ministers,

Communities across Canada have been left with hundreds of abandoned mines, exploration sites, and other toxic spaces. In many cases, corporate bankruptcy ensures that the federal government must assume liability for these sites. In other cases, the provinces and increasingly the territories take the lead.

Federal scientists have been actively pursuing new methods to remediate these sites, and Canadian program funding has expanded from small-scale experimental projects in the 1980s to the multi-billion dollar Federal Contaminated Sites Action Plan, which funds remediation works across Canada, including the Giant and Faro mines. Canadian government researchers have conducted innovative remediation research on pressing environmental concerns, including acid mine drainage. We appreciate the work that federal scientists and researchers like you have undertaken, including CANMET's research on improving safety and environmental health around abandoned and orphaned mines, and the research conducted through the [Mining Environment Neutral Drainage \(MEND\) program](#).

However, many challenges remain. Policies, programs, and research on abandoned mines and toxic sites are fragmented across jurisdictions. Financial security programs designed to have mining companies pay for remediation and reclamation programs may underestimate the costs of these activities, leaving the public responsible for post-closure expenditures. The federal government has failed to work toward a more integrated and coherent federal-provincial-territorial framework for addressing contaminated sites.

Existing federal programs have their substantial limitations. Indeed, the [Parliamentary Budget Officer](#) and [Environment Commissioner](#) have noted that the government does not release comprehensive information on many of these sites. As well, key initiatives have failed to materialize, including NOAMI's inventory of Canadian abandoned mines, which was [slated for completion in 2008](#).

Based on your expertise, we are writing to ask:

- Where are abandoned mines and contaminated sites located in Canada? How much will it cost to reclaim them and provide perpetual care for those sites that cannot be reclaimed?
- When will the National Orphaned and Abandoned Mines Initiative's inventory be completed and made available to the public? How will it be connected to other government databases such as the Federal Contaminated Sites Inventory, the National Pollutant Release Inventory, and the Canadian Arctic Northern Contaminants Program (CANCP)?
- What kinds of monitoring programs are in effect for tracking the status of decades-long remediation works across Canada, including the north?
- Given that funding for the Federal Contaminated Sites Program will conclude in 2018, what measures do you recommend for ensuring funding for ongoing remediation works (such as Faro Mine) and "new" abandoned mines that have lately been placed under the Contaminated Sites Program by default such as Nunavut's Jericho Mine? What are the estimated costs of these initiatives?
- Why were roughly 1000 sites left off of the Federal Contaminated Sites Inventory? How can communities living near these sites learn more about specific pollution mitigation efforts in their area?

We are writing this email as part of Write2Know (<http://write2know.ca>) a letter-writing campaign that aims to mobilize public awareness and inquiry into federal research programs. We want to let you know that we value federal science and scientists, and that our questions arise out of genuine concerns about the health and well-being of Canadians.

We are concerned about constraints on access to federal scientists and the results of their research, the implementation of their research findings, the elimination of essential research programs, and the closure of libraries and archives. These constraints and closures impact what Canadians can and cannot know about the health of their bodies, communities, and environments.

We are posing questions to federal scientists about their research and findings and forwarding our letters to federal election candidates to call attention to serious gaps between scientific evidence and government policy.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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