

January 10, 1950.

Dr. H.L. Keenleyside,
Commissioner of Northwest Territories,
Norlita Building,
Ottawa, Ontario.

Dear Dr. Keenleyside:

As you are aware, I have been carrying on correspondence recently with the Deputy Commissioner regarding arsenic pollution at Yellowknife. In a letter dated December 14th, I recommended that:

- a) the roaster operations be stopped forthwith and that they remain so until proper arsenic collection and disposal practices have been placed in operation;
- b) further surveys be carried out to determine the degree and extent of the hazard which at present exists and steps necessary to make the area safe in the future.

Dr. Farney and his associates report that this matter was before the recent meeting of the Northwest Territories Council for consideration. Since then I have been informed by telephone by Mr. Gibson that it was concluded that a letter should be addressed to the mining companies instructing them to take steps as quickly as possible to overcome this hazard.

Today, I received a report from our officials on the examination of certain specimens gathered by them during their recent trip to Yellowknife. As a result of these examinations they recommend that -

1. The local authorities at Yellowknife be notified that Kam Lake as a water supply is considered polluted and dangerous.
2. Local authorities at Yellowknife be notified that locally grown market garden vegetables should be withheld from distribution pending the results of further analyses.

The special reference to Kam Lake is because it is reported to be the secondary source of water supply for the townsite and the alleged water supply for the Bevan farm. It may be considered necessary to warn those living at the Bevan farm not to use the water from Kam Lake.

The special reference to locally grown vegetables is due to the fact that a sample of cabbage grown locally showed 0.674 parts of arsenic per million and celery showed 2.59 parts of arsenic per million. Under the Food and Drug Regulations, the limit of safety for arsenic is one part per million. Our feeling is that this sampling was small and that the results can only be considered a warning signal. Before we could express any reasonably sound opinion as to the extent of the danger from eating contaminated vegetables, we would require to have a larger and more complete sampling of local stocks. If you accept this point of view and wish to follow the matter through, would you mind asking an officer of your Department to get in touch with Dr. Charron.

I need hardly add that we are ready, at any time, to assist the Council in further investigations in connection with this problem. In my letter to Mr. Gibson, I suggested that there is not only the immediate problem of stopping the contamination but there is also the problem of watching the area, after contamination has been stopped, in order to follow the dispersal or dilution of the arsenic to the point where the area is again free from danger. This will require technical work and the services of people on the spot to take samples. Please let me know what help we can give in this regard.

Yours sincerely,

Original Signed by
G. D. W. CAMERON, M.D.

G.D.W. Cameron,
Deputy Minister of National Health.

GDWC/PC