

# Arsenic poisoning confirmed in N.S.

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acceptable levels. There have been six cases in which wells have been above that level, "but the tests are far from completed."

Mr. Sullivan said people whose wells had high levels, have been notified of the problem.

Besides the natural occurrence of arsenic in gold-mining areas and the use of arsenic in extraction, arsenic is also commonly found in mine tailings left near the site of old mines.

Irene Moore, the Hartlens' next-door neighbor, lives in a house that is 55 years old and just a stone's throw from a former mineshaft. But her well was cleared for drinking by the tests.

"But it almost frightened me to death when I first heard about it. I wondered if somebody had gone rampant and was putting arsenic in the wells," Mrs. Moore said. "We have a kind of a house built over ours (well) and I told my husband he had better padlock it."

Mrs. Moore said Mr. Hartlen has lost weight consistently over the years and has lived in his house since the early 1940s. At one point, more than a year ago, doctors had told him he suffered from fluid around the heart, she said. Dr. Hayne said Mr. Hartlen's symptoms were anemia, low blood pressure and numbness in his feet and "they didn't seem to fit anything."

Mrs. Moore said Waverley residents whose wells have been condemned have been borrowing water from the wells of neighbors. Besides remnants of the old mining community, several housing subdivisions have been established in the Waverley area in recent years and are primarily inhabited by railway and airport workers. About 2,000 people live in Waverley.

Other symptoms include a metallic taste in the mouth, dryness or constriction of the throat, cramps in the stomach, diarrhea, dehydration and loss of blood pressure.

Dr. Stanton cautioned residents who get their drinking water from wells not to panic, and said a person would have to consume water over a long period of time with very high concentration levels before he would exhibit signs of poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning is treatable unless it is in a very advanced stage.

Dr. Hayne said that in Mr. Hartlen's case, the patient was already showing signs of recovery simply as a result of halting his consumption of contaminated well water.

It is not unusual to find arsenic in gold-mining communities. Arsenic concentrations can come from three sources: arsenopyrites, a geological formation usually found in association with gold veins; arsenic used in the extraction of gold; and the dumping of waste from the gold mines in surrounding areas for fill or roadbuilding.

break of arsenic poisoning resulted from the spraying of insecticides near wells.

In the 1860s to the 1890s, Nova Scotia was one of the richest gold mining areas in the world. It was only with the discovery of gold in British Columbia, Northern Ontario, and the Yukon that many miners moved westward to improve their prospects.

The gold-mining region of the province extends from Yarmouth at the extreme west end of the province across the southern half through to Guysborough County at the east end. There

is only one gold-mining district on Cape Breton Island.

There are many old shafts from gold-mining operations still in evidence, especially in communities like Waverley. But John C. Smith, deputy minister of mines, said there has been no major mining of gold in Nova Scotia for at least 20 years because it has not been financially attractive.

Health officials said that Halifax water, which comes from a lake system not far from Waverley, probably is not endangered by high arsenic levels because metals tend

to settle out on to the lake bottom and are greatly diluted by the volume of water.

In Ontario, provincial officials know of three areas where arsenic is or has been a concern.

A spokesman for the Ministry of the Environment said in all cases arsenic levels in water were well within drinking-water quality standards.

Arsenic was found in the drinking water at Red Lake, and a nearby mine had to cut back on parts of its operation last year.

Privately, doctors wonder if undetected arsenic poisoning might have killed at least one man from the Waverley who died of a mysterious disease in hospital several months ago.

Dr. Hayne said it was very difficult to trace the history of symptoms and disease once arsenic was detected because most cases in medical journals are of acute poisoning administered with criminal intent. Several doctors who reviewed all available literature on the subject found no cases of arsenic poisoning related to gold mines, although there was a case in the Midwestern United States where an out-

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