

**resources needed to finish cleaning up abandoned industrial and military sites that are contaminated with toxic substances.**

In its Yellowknife session, the Committee heard several elders who spoke about the environmental changes they had experienced in their lifetime — the pollution of water bodies, the transformation of the landscape, the disruption to wildlife. These changes had occurred as a result of mining development and had clearly proved detrimental to the traditional way of life of the local inhabitants. The Committee was disturbed by the elders' resulting loss of confidence in the government's ability to protect their environment and health. Nowhere was this loss of trust more apparent than on the issue of arsenic pollution.

Arsenic has been released into the Yellowknife environment since gold mining started in the area. In the 1940s, emissions from the Giant Mine were estimated at 7300 kg/day. Today, as a result of the installation of control equipment and improvements in operation and maintenance procedures, daily emissions range between 20 kg and 30 kg.

The NWT Water Board regulates the discharge of arsenic into water by issuing water licenses. The allowable concentration of arsenic in the final effluent of the Giant Mine has been reduced from 5000 parts per billion allowable under the 1979-1981 water license to 500 parts per billion allowable under the 1993-1998 license. The federal and territorial governments do not regulate arsenic air emissions.

Because of historically high emissions, arsenic has been a public health issue in Yellowknife for a long time. The Committee finds this issue troubling. On the one hand, government studies show that arsenic levels in Yellowknife Bay are substantially lower today than the NWT Water Board's allowable limit for drinking water and meet the drinking water guidelines of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment. Arsenic levels in the air surrounding Yellowknife are below the 24-hour average limit set by Ontario, the only Canadian jurisdiction to set ambient air standards for arsenic.

On the other hand, in 1993 the Ministers of the Environment and Health concluded that "the current concentrations of inorganic arsenic in Canada may be harmful to the environment and may constitute a danger in Canada to human life or health".<sup>7</sup> They therefore deemed arsenic to be toxic under the meaning of section 11 of CEPA but have not yet taken steps to regulate arsenic discharges.

The Committee finds the apparent inconsistency between the reassuring conclusions reached regarding the safety of Yellowknife air and drinking water on the one hand, and the toxicity finding on the other, to be disturbing.

**The Committee recommends that the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Health conclude their determination of the measures they plan to apply to arsenic by December 1995.**

**RECOMMENDATION  
107**

<sup>7</sup> Government of Canada, Canadian Environmental Protection Act: Priority Substances List Assessment Report — Arsenic and its Compounds, 1993, p vii.