

No 'imminent health hazard' from Giant emissions — report



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by Doug Schmidt
Northern News Services

Sulphur dioxide emissions from the Giant mine roaster stack do not present "an imminent health hazard" to Yellowknifers, says a federal health assessment.

Nevertheless, the report, released Wednesday, indicates "sensitive individuals" could suffer "respiratory effects" from exposure.

As a result, regional medical health officer Dr. Richard Nuttall says the government

is asking Royal Oak Mines to reduce its emissions as "good corporate citizens."

A recent Renewable Resources investigation blamed the up to 65 tonnes of daily sulphur dioxide emissions from the stack for damaging vegetation north of Giant and for periodically pushing Yellowknife air quality outside federal pollution guidelines.

Despite this week's assessment by the Ottawa-based Environmental Health

Directorate, Nuttall says the current level of emissions are "not doing anyone any good."

"We want them to do something," he says.

Officials with the departments of Health and Renewable Resources met with Giant mine management yesterday to press ahead with two "suggestions."

Nuttall says the government wants Giant to install in-stack monitoring devices as soon as possible to ensure

accurate data on future emission levels. It also wants the company to "look at" modern abatement technology for sulphur dioxide and for arsenic.

Both chemicals are released into the atmosphere as a result of the gold extraction process at the mine.

"In their annual report they say they want to be good corporate citizens," says Nuttall.

"If they are dedicated to

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the people in this community ... I think we can make some progress."

"Before, this was always opinion — I think we're on firmer ground now to move the discussion ahead," he says of the initial two-year investigation and subsequent human health risk assessment.

The assessment report says some of the peak levels of SO₂ measured "may be cause for some concern relative to vegetation, however, these levels would not be expected to result in adverse human health effects."

The report also says "exposure to arsenic should be reduced to the lowest possible level."

Those levels have been

significantly reduced at Giant over the past several decades, but arsenic levels in the Yellowknife air are above those recorded in major Canadian cities to the south.

Nuttall says there will be continued monitoring and further meetings with mine management to seek ways of reducing those emissions.