



Health and Welfare  
Canada

Santé et Bien-être social  
Canada

850-5-X751

Medical Services  
Northwest Territories Region  
14th Floor Baker Centre  
10025 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5J 1H2

ACTION		PA date	BF date
M	145	175m75	
INFORMATION			
M	16	M	M
M	FC	M	V
M		M	I

January 13, 1975

Your file    Votre référence

Our file    Notre référence

151-1-5-N (N1)

Commissioner S. M. Hodgson  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Dear Mr. Hodgson:

Re: A rsenic Pollution in Yellowknife, N.W.T.

I am sure you will know that the Minister of Health, The Honourable Marc Lalonde, issued a statement on this subject on January 9th. I append a copy for your use.

May I draw your attention to the Minister's statement concerning the problem of some residents using the water of Yellowknife Bay rather than the protected town supply. It is believed that this chiefly concerns the residents of Latham Island, the old town and around the Bay.

I would request your Government to examine the possibility of ensuring delivery of a supply of safe water from the town supply to all residents who may otherwise not receive it, regardless of their ability to pay for it.

The Department of National Health and Welfare has on so many occasions in the past received your ready cooperation in matters of mutual concern, and I feel sure I can count on your positive response to this request.

Yours sincerely,  
Original Signed By  
F. J. COVILL, M.B. D.P.H.

F. J. Covill, M.B., B.S., M.F.C.M., D.P.H.  
Regional Director

Enc.

cc: Director General, Program Management, M.S.  
Zone Director, Mackenzie Zone

1.7.1



039218

MEDICAL SERVICES  
HEADQUARTERS

JAN 15 11 33 AM '75

QUARTIERS GENERAUX  
SERVICES MEDICAUX

E 7 COAST  
OUBOY 2100 9 LA

M	M	I
M	M	M
M	M	M
INFORMATION		
M		
ACTION	PA 2100	BE 2100



STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE MARC LALONDE  
ON ARSENIC POLLUTION IN YELLOWKNIFE, N.W.T.

January 9, 1975

The CBC National radio broadcast "As It Happens", January 8, 1975, reported on arsenic in the environment of Yellowknife, N.W.T., and quoted from a study conducted in the late 1960's by staff of the Department concerning the health of people in the Yellowknife area.

This study was carried out as a result of a concern by my Department about the presence of arsenic in the environment around Yellowknife, arising from gold mining operations in the area.

The report itself recognized that causes other than arsenic pollution were probably involved in the health conditions reported, and the report did not establish a relationship between arsenic pollution and the incidence of cancer. Indeed the report stated that deaths from cancer in Yellowknife seemed to be lower than elsewhere in Canada. I have given instructions that this report be made available to anyone interested.

Nevertheless there was and is a proper concern about any significant pollution problem, especially its long-range health implications. As a result of the survey conducted by the Department, a number of steps were taken by the Federal



and Territorial governments to control and monitor the problem and especially to ensure a safe water supply. A new source of water for the town was put in place in 1968-69 and has operated since then. This involves drawing water from the Yellowknife River north of its confluence with Yellowknife Bay. The town water supply has been continually monitored since 1969 and arsenic has never been detected in it during that period.

In addition, I am told that there have been major improvements in the control of pollution in the operations of the mines. Effluent is contained in tailing ponds, and airborne waste is captured and bagged.

The CBC radio broadcast reported on the problem of some residents using the water from Yellowknife Bay rather than the protected town supply, and eating fish from the Bay. This is a matter of concern to the health authorities, especially since significantly higher readings of contamination in the Bay were measured by the Federal Department of the Environment after two accidental spills of mine tailings into the water of the Bay in the Spring of 1974. The local health authorities warned the town of Yellowknife of the problem in July and posted signs to warn residents not to use the water. The health authorities also consulted with the Department of Environment and DOE has taken legal action against the firm



responsible since that Department at present possesses stronger legal powers in this connection. The Environmental Contaminants Act currently before Parliament will provide an effective way to control this type of pollution problem in the future and to take appropriate action against offenders.

In summary, considerable progress has been made in monitoring and controlling the problem of arsenic pollution in Yellowknife. The town water supply has been made safe, and pollution abatement equipment is now in place. Nevertheless, in light of the concern about this matter, I have asked for certain further steps to be taken as well:

1. Local health officials will urge on the town of Yellowknife the need to ensure a supply of safe water from the town supply to all residents, notwithstanding their ability to pay for it. Indeed I have been told that the Territorial Government has already issued instructions this be done.
2. There will be an increased campaign to inform residents of the dangers of the use of water from the Bay, through the activities of public health personnel and by information bulletins to the news media.
3. Territorial authorities have agreed to a survey of arsenic levels in residents of Yellowknife, to be carried out by my Department. Special attention will be paid to long-time residents, the native people and high-risk population groups.



such as children, but the service will be available to all residents. Persons found to have significant levels of arsenic in their blood or hair will be encouraged to undergo detailed clinical examination and thereafter will be followed up, on a regular basis, by the health authorities.

4. The health staff in N.W.T. will be augmented to provide these services and to provide also an augmented environmental health inspection service as well as co-ordination and collection of all available data on arsenic levels in humans, fish, water and soil etc. within the Yellowknife area.

January 10, 1974

To: Regional Directors (Pacific Region & Northwest Territories Region)

From: D.E. Dewar, Medical Services, Ottawa.



Medical Services  
Northwest Territories Region  
14th Floor Baker Centre  
10025 106 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta  
T5J 1H2

P.A.

Om

Arsenic in Yellowknife

January 13, 1975

151-1-5-H (H1)

Commissioner S. M. Hodgson  
Government of the Northwest Territories  
Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Dear Mr. Hodgson:

Re: Arsenic Pollution in Yellowknife, N.W.T.

I am sure you will know that the Minister of Health, The Honourable Marc Lalonde, issued a statement on this subject on January 9th. I append a copy for your use.

May I draw your attention to the Minister's statement concerning the problem of some residents using the water of Yellowknife Bay rather than the protected town supply. It is believed that this chiefly concerns the residents of Latham Island, the old town and around the Bay.

I would request your Government to examine the possibility of ensuring delivery of a supply of safe water from the town supply to all residents who may otherwise not receive it, regardless of their ability to pay for it.

The Department of National Health and Welfare has on so many occasions in the past received your ready cooperation in matters of mutual concern, and I feel sure I can count on your positive response to this request.

Yours sincerely,

Original Signed By

F. J. COVILL, M.D., D.P.H.

F. J. Covill, M.B., B.S., M.F.C.M., D.P.H.  
Regional Director

Enc.

cc: Director General, Program Management, M.S.  
Zone Director, Mackenzie Zone

Copy to M 20-11  
and P. Woodhouse