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Congrès du travail du Canada

Soumission annuelle au Cabinet

Commentaires concernant le paragraphe sur l'arsenic à Yellowknife traité
sous le thème "Environnement".

A new source of water for the town was put in place in 1968-69 and has operated since then. The town water supply has been continually monitored since the installation and arsenic has never been detected in it during that period.

In addition, 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.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare has asked that certain further steps 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.
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 National Health and Welfare. 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.

P.A.
L.L.L. Annual Submission
to Government 1975

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Environment

Further disturbing evidence of the shortcomings of Canada's environmental policies and their administration came to light during the past year.

For example, arsenic poisoning of the lake water in Yellowknife, rendered it unfit for drinking. The danger was further magnified because only English warning signs were posted, and only those who could afford to pay could obtain water from an unpoisoned source.

The increasing number of oil spills during the past year, particularly those along the Labrador coast is a cause of deep concern. It should be mandatory that adequate training courses be provided and fail-safe mechanisms be employed in handling oil in order to minimize the risk of oil spills.

Another cause of deep concern to Canadians is the proposal to ship oil and gas by tanker through Canadian coastal waters particularly in the Arctic. The environmental hazards are enormous. We urge your government to take prompt and effective steps to prevent environmental damage by asserting Canada's sovereignty over coastal waters. It is apparent that the first step is to provide adequate surveillance.

Congrès du Travail du Canada

Soumission Annuelle au Cabinet

Commentaires concernant quelques aspects du document, p. 68-70 ("Environment").

p. 68 "Arsenic poisoning of the lake water in Yellowknife rendered it unfit for drinking".

Commentary:

The limits for arsenic contamination of a potable water supply are: ~~(acceptable 0.01 ppm, maximum permissible 0.05 ppm.~~ Until 1969, the water supply used by most people in the Yellowknife area was derived from the west side of Yellowknife Bay on Great Slave Lake. Analyses showed that during the period 1951-69, the town water supply was ~~(within the acceptable limit for arsenic for 16% of the time and was below the maximum permissible limit for 86% of the time.~~ As a result, in December 1969, the town of Yellowknife and the community at Giant were connected to a water supply derived from the Yellowknife River north of its confluence with Yellowknife Bay. Since then, arsenic contamination in Yellowknife tap water has been monitored by Environment Canada. Arsenic has not been detected in the town water supply at any time since 1969. In the spring of 1974, two spills of mining tailings occurred which contaminated lake water at the north end of Yellowknife Bay. Neither of these spills affected the town water supply, but the native population living on the North Shore was warned not to take drinking water from the lake. Environment Canada is taking legal action against the company concerned in order to minimize the possibility of future spills.

*note on
city water supply
to see
city 197*