

850-5-X751 Mr. Hickman
Feb. 18 '75
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Copy for Minister
Copy for Deputy Minister
Please return to Medical Services
Please return to Dr. E. Somers
when signed and dated
Please return to Dr. A.B. Morrison
Assistant Deputy Minister

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Feb. 28/75

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Dr. H. Tyson,
Associate Professor,
Biology Department,
McGill University,
P.O. Box 6070,
Montreal, Quebec.

Dear Dr. Tyson:

The Honourable Marc Lalonde, Minister of National Health and Welfare, has asked me to reply to your letter of January 20, 1975, concerning arsenic pollution in the Yellowknife area.

The Department of National Health and Welfare has been active in reducing the risk to health posed by arsenic in the Yellowknife area since the existence of the problem was first realized in 1949. The report referred to in the CBC programme, "As It Happens", was compiled in 1969 as an internal working document intended to inform those responsible for instituting various remedial measures about the success of their efforts to date. It also served as a basis to measure the effectiveness of future efforts in the region and to indicate whether further measures needed to be taken in order to protect the health of both workers in the gold-producing plants and the local inhabitants in general. It is a highly technical document written by specialists in the environmental health field in terms intended to inform other specialists in the field.

Contrary to the impression that may have been created by the recent CBC programme, there has been no attempt on the part of this Department to suppress information concerning the situation at Yellowknife. Data concerning the levels of arsenic in the local environment were published as long ago as 1955 in the scientific literature. The health survey document prepared in 1969 was distributed to several government departments which were involved in monitoring the situation at Yellowknife

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Dr. H. Tyson,

or which were responsible for various abatement measures that have been instituted and copies were provided to the Yellowknife City Council and the Territorial Government authorities.

It must be borne in mind that health surveys of the type conducted at Yellowknife involve a physician-patient relationship which may imply a degree of confidentiality to protect the interests of those individuals who co-operate with us. The current policy of this Department is well illustrated by the procedures that have been adopted in recent surveys to determine blood levels of mercury in various groups of native people. Several native associations are represented on a Standing Committee convened by this Department which co-ordinates activities in this field. In addition, through Medical Services personnel of this Department, or through corresponding medical personnel of the provinces, those individuals who have co-operated by giving blood samples or by undergoing clinical examinations, are informed of the results of tests performed on them. The results of such surveys are made public and if the technical details are considered to be of sufficient interest, summaries of the information are disseminated by publication in the normal scientific and medical literature.

In relation to your question concerning the Canadian Drinking Water Standards and Objectives, 1968, these standards are currently undergoing revision by a Federal/Provincial Working Group on Drinking Water set up in 1974. It is expected that the revised standards will be published later this year.

Yours truly,

Original Signed By
ANN. C. JAMIESON

Ann C. Jamieson,
Executive Assistant.