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VEGETABLES FROM YELLOWKNIFE, FALL 1970

A committee to advise on various aspects of pollution in Northern Canada has been established by the Directors General of Health Services, Food and Drug and Medical Services Branches. Its members are Dr. A.J. deVilliers, Dr. J.A. Campbell and Dr. W.H. Frost, who acts as Chairman. The current situation in relation to the health aspects and adequacy of control of arsenic pollution at Yellowknife was one of the committee's first considerations. One of its duties will be to advise Medical Services in regard to statements for release to the public. In this connection, reference was made to an inquiry from Mrs. A.J. Richardson, Secretary of the Yellowknife Branch, Consumers Association of Canada, concerning analyses performed on vegetables grown at Yellowknife in private gardens during 1970.

The committee has recommended that Mrs. Richardson be informed that while it was not possible to arrange for a complete series of analyses this year, preliminary testing was carried out on vegetables from several sites around Yellowknife which were collected toward the end of the season. The results do not give rise to any cause for alarm, but the actual figures need interpretation in the knowledge of the short seasonal use of locally grown vegetables.

The tests indicated only the total arsenic content of the samples which included surface contamination and, in some cases, attached soil. No analyses were possible this year on vegetable cores or vegetables washed to remove surface contamination and soil. More vegetables will need to be collected next year for such tests. All samples of vegetables collected at one site in the city and at another site at the Con Mine showed an acceptably low content of arsenic. These comprised the majority of the samples. Some specimens however, collected at other sites in the town and at Giant Mine showed moderately higher amounts of arsenic, but it was not determined whether this was in the core or on the surface where it could have been removed by washing. In view of the limited and seasonal consumption of vegetables grown in the Yellowknife area, and the low amounts of arsenic found in over half of the samples, the committee did not consider it necessary to make any public recommendations. It is considered that persons growing vegetables do not distribute them widely and that they wash them before consumption.

The general situation and the controls being exercised at Yellowknife are regarded as being satisfactory for the present.