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# Pollution secrecy angers City Council

by LANNY COOKE

Yellowknife City council is enraged about the way that the federal government and Giant Mines handled the flow of toxic materials from the Mine into Yellowknife Bay.

"City officials received a real snow job by Environment Canada and Giant Mine", said Alderman Bob Jenkins at a council meeting April 22. "A deadly poison has been on Yellowknife Bay and 11 days went by before the city was notified. This isn't something new but it's time it stopped."

The council unanimously ap-

proved five motions presented by Aldermen Jenkins, Brian Purdy and Colin Wynne highly critical of the federal government and Giant Mine's actions regarding the latest toxic spills into Yellowknife Bay.

Giant Mine spilled effluent from the tailings pond containing cyanide and arsenic onto two acres of Yellowknife Bay sometime in March. The company did not notify Environment Canada of the spill.

Environment Canada found out about the spill March 28 but did not inform the city until April 10. Sandy Lewis of Environment Canada in Yellowknife explained

that the department did tests on the spill before it informed the public. The tests proved that the effluent was toxic.

"The facts, as they should have been presented, were not presented to the city," said Mr. Jenkins visibly upset. "No one thought, or had the courtesy to call the city."

He also complained that the department failed to notify the city of Yellowknife of a second unchecked spill located much closer to the water intake for the city. This spill is slower and has been continuing over a long period of time, he said.

"The whole area is saturated

with leakage" he said. "I do feel that there is a serious health hazard potentially with us."

He explained that if a major fire or break should occur in the present pressure system, extra emergency pumps would draw water directly from Yellowknife Bay into the water system for the city.

The council unanimously passed two motions condemning the local officials of the federal government for failing to inform the municipality of the first spill and continuing to conceal and failing to remedy the second spill.

Giant Mine did not escape condemnation. The council was critical of the mine for allowing such spills to ever occur. "It's time that this stopped," Mr. Jenkins exclaimed "Giant will have to spend some money to repair their facilities."

The mayor was also criticised for condoning and accepting the concealment of information from the public and the council. It was also suggested that in the future the mayor immediately and fully inform council of all matters which may affect the health or welfare of the citizens in Yellowknife.

A motion also instructed the mayor not to be a party to any

private or secret consultations, meetings, arrangements, or agreements without first receiving approval of council.

Because the mayor is presently away from the capital, the council voted to table both motions regarding his behaviour in the affair until he could be present.

Mr. Lewis, defending his actions before the council, said that the tailings that had spilled onto the ice were of no immediate concern to the people of Yellowknife.

He explained that Environment Canada is not responsible for the responsible for the health of humans but only of fish. "There was not excessive arsenic in the fish from the spill," he reported.

The Department of Health and Welfare is responsible for ensuring that the spills do not cause a public health hazard to humans he said.

"Spills of this sort are not an new occurrence," he told the council. "This type of spill has happened many times." He explained that these latest spills are just symptoms of an old problem.

It's not an easy matter to judge when to and when not to inform the public of a spill, according to

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## CITY COUNCIL

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Mr. Lewis. "It is irresponsible to release information before the facts are confirmed. In this case," he explained, "the facts were not available until April 10."

The mine has corrected the problem of the first spill he said, and have attempted to plug the leak in the tailings pond that caused the second spill. He added that the second spill "has been going on so long that it's now part of the map series for that area."

"The technology is not all that great in dealing with problems of this sort," he said. "The mine is taking all the steps it can possibly take." As far as it is technologically possible the problems have been rectified he said.

However Alderman Jenkins was not satisfied. He explained

that he had flown over the two spills April 21 and noticed that both were still visible from the air.

The council agreed to a motion that immediate, effective, and permanent action be taken by the federal government to remove all hazard from the two existing spills and possible future spills from Giant.

Alderman Purdy cautioned the

council that there is no need to believe that there is any acute problem of poisoning from the bay, but it is a long term problem.

"This has always been the excuse for not doing anything about it," said Alderman Wynne. "This is a chronic problem. Over a period of years we build up an accumulation of this poison."

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