

16 October 2015

Cindy Blancher-Smith
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Mines Ministers of Canada (federal, provincial, territorial)

Dear Ms. Blancher-Smith and Mines Ministers,

Communities across Canada have been left with hundreds of abandoned mines, exploration sites, and other toxic spaces. In many cases, corporate bankruptcy ensures that the federal government must assume liability for these sites. In other cases, the provinces and increasingly the territories take the lead. Federal scientists have been actively pursuing new methods to remediate these sites, and Canadian program funding has expanded from small-scale experimental projects in the 1980s to the multi-billion dollar Federal Contaminated Sites Action Plan, which funds remediation works across Canada, including the Giant and Faro mines. Canadian government researchers have conducted innovative remediation research on pressing environmental concerns, including acid mine drainage. We appreciate the work that federal scientists and researchers like you have undertaken, including CANMET's research on improving safety and environmental health around abandoned and orphaned mines, and the research conducted through the Mining Environment Neutral Drainage (MEND) program.

However, many challenges remain. Policies, programs, and research on abandoned mines and toxic sites are fragmented across jurisdictions. Financial security programs designed to have mining companies pay for remediation and reclamation programs may underestimate the costs of these activities, leaving the public responsible for post-closure expenditures. The federal government has failed to work toward a more integrated and coherent federal-provincial-territorial framework for addressing contaminated sites.

Existing federal programs have their substantial limitations. Indeed, the Parliamentary Budget Officer and Environment Commissioner have noted that the government does not release comprehensive information on many of these sites. As well, key initiatives have failed to materialize, including NOAMI's inventory of Canadian abandoned mines, which was slated for completion in 2008.

Based on your expertise, we are writing to ask:

Where are abandoned mines and contaminated sites located in Canada? How much will it cost to reclaim them and provide perpetual care for those sites that cannot be reclaimed?

When will the National Orphaned and Abandoned Mines Initiative's inventory be completed and made available to the public? How will it be connected to other

government databases such as the Federal Contaminated Sites Inventory, the National Pollutant Release Inventory, and the Canadian Arctic Northern Contaminants Program (CANCP)?

What kinds of monitoring programs are in effect for tracking the status of decades-long remediation works across Canada, including the north?

Given that funding for the Federal Contaminated Sites Program will conclude in 2018, what measures do you recommend for ensuring funding for ongoing remediation works (such as Faro Mine) and “new” abandoned mines that have lately been placed under the Contaminated Sites Program by default such as Nunavut’s Jericho Mine? What are the estimated costs of these initiatives?

Why were roughly 1000 sites left off of the Federal Contaminated Sites Inventory?

How can communities living near these sites learn more about specific pollution mitigation efforts in their area?

This email is part of the Write2Know (<http://write2know.ca>) initiative, a letter-writing campaign that aims to mobilize public awareness and inquiry into federal research programs. We want to let you know that we value federal science and scientists, and that our questions arise out of genuine concerns about the health and well-being of Canadians.

We are concerned about constraints on access to federal scientists and the results of their research, the elimination of essential research programs, and the closure of libraries and archives. These constraints and closures impact what Canadians can and cannot know about the health of their bodies, communities, and environments.

We are posing questions to federal scientists about their research and findings and forwarding our letters to federal election candidates to call attention to serious gaps between scientific evidence and government policy.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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