

## **Jurisdictional Update**

**Gregg Stewart, British Columbia Ministry of Agriculture and Lands  
NOAMI Workshop on Best Practices for Orphaned and Abandoned Mines  
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Good Morning,

I want to provide you with a very brief jurisdictional update from British Columbia regarding the issue of addressing orphaned and abandoned mines in the province.

I work for the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands which may appear to be a somewhat strange fit for orphaned/abandoned mines but our branch specific mandate is to manage the provincial Crown lands which make up 94% of the provincial land base.

As some of you are aware British Columbia has a relatively long history of mining and therefore a resulting significant orphaned/abandoned mines issue. The province however has made significant progress in addressing this issue over the past 3 years based on establishing a dedicated program with a significant operating budget.

BC does not have a stand alone orphaned/abandoned mines program as in some other provincial jurisdictions but the Crown Contaminated Sites Branch addresses a broad range of contaminated sites including landfills, pulp mills, highways yards, oil & gas sites, and other industrial sites similar to the Federal Program north of 60.

Orphaned and Abandoned mines however are a large subset of provincial contaminated sites inventory and rank as one of the higher risk industrial categories due to the large number of sites and potential human health and environmental impacts. Current estimates indicate that there are approximately 2000 historic mines in British Columbia.

The genesis of the Crown Contaminated Sites program was the result of the province responding to a Report of the Auditor General in 2002 that was critical of the government's management of Provincial contaminated Sites.

The Auditor General recommended that:

- A lead agency should be identified with the appropriate authority to oversee development and implementation of a contaminated sites program.
- Government should develop a province-wide prioritization process for site identification.
- Government should establish a management accountability framework for its contaminated sites that requires the disclosure of environmental liabilities, expenditures and information about accomplishments.

To meet the recommendations of the Auditor General the Crown Contaminated Sites Branch was established in 2003 and is responsible for leading the development and implementation of the program. Our work is assisted by participation of an interagency committee of resource and central agency ministries. Principle resource agencies include Energy and Mines, Forests, Highways, Crown lands and the Oil & Gas Commission.

The branch operates under a Cabinet approved policy that outlines principles and polices related to responsibilities, liabilities and site prioritization (available on MAL's Website).

Our remediation of orphaned and abandoned mines is subject to the provisions under the Environmental Management Act and Contaminated Sites Regulations, which is based on a polluter pay principle and lays out a fairly prescriptive process for addressing and managing contamination and is based on the source-pathway-receptor model. The legislation also prescribes the

assignment of liability. Therefore the government of BC will only expense public funds on those sites where no responsible person can be found and the site in many instances has escheated to the Crown.

We have developed a prioritization process specific to mines site where by we rank sites based on potential impacts to human/health and the environment and some of you may be familiar with the BC Historic Mines Sites Atlas which was a joint effort between the province of British Columbia and Environment Canada which ranks sites based on specified criteria (coarse ranking system). I can't get into the details but we look a criteria including acid rock drainage/ML potential, proximity of mines to communities (to address access and water quality issues), sensitive fish habitat, and geochemical indicators.

We are currently refining our prioritization process and have just negotiated a contract with a BC based consulting firm to undertake a comprehensive review of risks and develop a science based site ranking methodology for high risk sites. We anticipate a product at the end of January 2007.

Regarding funding, the BC government since 2001 has committed 180 million dollars to for the management of the province's contaminated sites. An additional 47.2 million has been allocated to the program for 2007 to 2009.

The source of these funds is direct government funding from general revenue. There currently are no partnership funding programs in BC with the mining industry or Good Samaritan programs and we need to move in that direction and the good work of NOAMI provides a starting point to advancing in these key policy areas.

Regarding the auditor's recommendation to establish an accountability frame work, the province has developed a Crown Contaminated database which is a central repository for all provincial contaminated sites and there is approximately over 800 sites in the system with targets for annual uploads.

The program reports financial expenditures and liabilities to the office of the comptroller general on an annual basis and program accomplishments in a Biennial Report.

Our program performance targets are to investigate 10 new sites on an annual basis, which presently happen to all be mines sites with appropriate follow up from field investigations and analytical results.

Significant program successes include remediation of the Britannia mine which resulted in a successful P3 project with EPCOR water services to design, build, finance, and operate a high density sludge water treatment plant.

Another major project is the Yankee Girl mine tailings site which is a historic mine site near Nelson BC where tailings have eroded into a fish bearing river for several years. Through significant study we have arrived at a remediation plan which will protect human health and the environment which involved innovative solution including an in stream erosion barrier and engineered cover which will be completed in 2007.

This project also included public consultation over a number of years with community members in a series of public meeting and open houses.

Pit River landfill was cleaned up in 2005 to stop the erosion of garbage and contaminates into the Pitt River. Total remediation costs were approximately \$3.4 million.

I would like to bring to your attention our biennial report, which highlights the Crown Contaminated Sites Program in BC.