

A Short History of Community Involvement in the Issue of Mine Abandonment in Canada



1980's: single industry towns

- Canadian Association of Single Industry Towns
- Facing closure of many mines, towns mobilize
- Queen's undertakes major study
- Issues: new economic opportunities, industrial adjustment packages, retraining

Growing list of environmental concerns

- 1987- Highway collapses at Cobalt
- 1990- Matachewan tailings dam breaks
- 1995- Mt Washington destroying \$2 million/year salmon fishery
- 1996- Britannia leaching AMD into Howe Sound
- 1997-1999- a number of mines go bankrupt in the North- Giant, Faro, BYG

Communities Getting Worried

- Over 10,000 abandoned mines in Canada
- Growing public awareness of the issue during the 1990's
- Number of closures and bankruptcies leave communities with the impacts
- Subsidence and tailings dam failures in Canada

Community organizes for Britannia Clean-up



Mt. Washington: destroying a \$2 million/year salmon fishery; community mobilizes to fix it



Canadian Arctic Resources Committee, Yukon Conservation Society and First Nations draw attention to problems in the NWT:



GiantMine-
237,000 tonnes of arsenic tri-oxide
stored underground



Port Radium-Village of Widows
Multi-media tour organized by Cindy Gilday



Deloro Mine in Ontario

- Community with support of Trent University organizes for clean-up
- Health concerns paramount



Northwatch and other groups raise concerns in
Ontario:
Hollinger Mine threatening Timmins



Kam Kotia
More acidic than battery acid

- Local community getting worried
- Northwatch advocates for clean-up
- Doug King does forestry die back study



Timmins sinkhole 2005

Crown Pillar collapse



Internationally, communities also demanding change:

- 1995- Omai spill
- 1996- Marinduque spills
- 1996- Los Frailes dam failure
 - Summitville disaster
- 1997- Golden Dreams, Poisoned Streams published in US
- 1998- the Ugly Canadian broadcast
- 2001- MMSD Report responds to pressure from mining activist groups
- 2002- UNEP report on Tailings dam failures
- 2005- UNEP report “Mining for Closure”

Canadian governments respond

- 1993- Canadian Council of Ministry of the Environment issues report on contaminated sites
- 1996-Auditor-General report on contaminated sites
- 1998- Canada –Wide Accord on Environmental Harmonization affirms “polluter pays” principle; ICME report on reclamation bonding
- 2002- Auditor General report on Abandoned Mines in the North

Communities raise a collective voice in Canada

- January 2000- Mining’s Toxic Orphans
- February 2000- Mackasey Report
- June 2001 – conference in Winnipeg
- 2003- federal government budget allocation \$175 million
- December 2003- Edmonton Journal series
- 2004 - \$4 billion for federal contaminated sites in budget

Principles of community involvement

- Representativeness and inclusivity
- Hold meetings in affected communities
- Provide resources so community can participate: childcare, expenses
- Provide financial resources for technical help
- Integrate all concerns: health, social, environmental, economic, cultural

Closure and post-closure

- Community monitoring with financial support for technicians/experts
- Need for health assessments and risk assessments (CEPA toxics)
- Opportunities for community employment:
- Development of skills and education for environmental industries, including worker health and safety concerns
- Relocation if required

Mining for closure

- The recognition that mining is in fact a waste management industry with a limited life.
- Communities: they have few of the benefits and all the impacts.

In summary:

- The most important role of communities has been as catalysts advocating to clean up the sites that affect them and their families
- Without community pressure, there is no political will to act.
- It is in everyone's interests to clean-up abandoned mines and prevent new ones from occurring
- We know how to build citizen capacity and should support measures to do it.

If we work together,
we can clean up the mess.

