

Terrace Bay - Schreiber

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Meeting concerning Mineral Transfer Facility does little to allay citizens concerns

MOE testing moves to next step

By Dave Chmara

Although mineral concentrations at Canadian Pacific's mineral transfer facility in Schreiber were hundreds of times higher than Ministry of the Environment guidelines, the MOE is thus far powerless to impose a control order to Canadian Pacific Railways.

Officials from MOE, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Schreiber town council, CP and the Concerned Citizens Committee of Schreiber, met last Friday evening to fully discuss past, present and future plans for the transfer facility.

Moss bag and snow sampling tests conducted last fall showed concentrations of Zinc, Cadmium, Copper and other minerals to be well above MOE guidelines.

But Don Murray, district officer for the Thunder Bay branch of the MOE, said, "these tests are used to identify problems or potential problems."

He explained that the guidelines are established by determining mineral and chemical levels in non-polluted areas of the province. These levels are then averaged which give a guideline for minerals and chemicals.

Murray went on to explain the guidelines are a monitoring technique and have no direct relationship to health concerns.

"Anything (levels) above the guidelines are not normal but do not necessarily relate to health hazards," said Murray.

He said the moss bag and snow sampling tests are an investigative tool to determine if problems may be present.

"This has lead to the second phase of the investigation," said Murray.

Last April, hi-vol tests began at one location and a second location will be added beginning July 3.

Hi-vol testing involves drawing air through a filter to determine dust levels, and the level of minerals (Zinc, Copper and Cadmium) contained in the dust.

Air is drawn through the filter for a 24-hour period once every six days, after which a new filter is put in place. Once a month, the filters are sent to a private lab in Ottawa for analysis.



The Concerned Citizens Committee of Schreiber held a demonstration march last Saturday through the town of Schreiber. They are protesting because they want CP's Mineral Transfer Facility taken out of Schreiber and are also concerned about possible health hazards posed by the blowing dust when trucks are unloading and the rail cars are loaded.

Photo by Dave Chmara

Don Racette, an environmental scientist with the MOE, said the testing takes six to eight weeks and, "these tests do apply to health concerns and if (levels) are exceeded, court action can be taken to solve any problems."

Racette said the hi-vol tests are usually conducted for a period of one year or more, but added, "we probably won't wait that long before action is taken if the samples exceed regulations."

Murray explained there are some problems regarding who has jurisdiction over the situation.

Because CP operates on federal property, MOE has no jurisdiction on their property. But Murray said the province can take action if problems occur off of CP property.

Murray said, "if activity on federal property has an impact on adjoining property, we do have jurisdiction. We try to get a commitment to solve the problem within a reasonable amount of time but if that can't be done we can and do make use of the courts."

In addition to the hi-vol tests, vegetation and soil tests will be conducted beginning this August.

Rose Renaud, chairperson for the CCCS, said the group is tired of all the testing and it's time for action.

When the results of the moss bag and snow sampling tests were released, CP said the tests were invalid because operating proce-

dures had changed since the tests were conducted. Renaud is concerned CP will try to do the same thing with the hi-vol tests if results indicate levels exceed regulations and the results take too long to come back.

The CCCS is upset no action is being taken following the report indicating mineral levels exceeded MOE guidelines. The group feels because the guidelines have been exceeded, steps should be taken to close down the mineral transfer facility.

But Racette and Murray explained no action could be taken as no proof has yet been obtained that regulations, and not guidelines, have been broken.

Dr. Sam Graham, medical officer of health for the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, commented on the possible health hazards saying, "I think a poor diet or smoking would present more of a health problem" than the dust from the transfer facility.

Graham added, "I think any problems experienced would be acute. To experience any long term effects I think you'd literally have to eat it."

He mentioned he has spoken with doctors here and they have given no indication of any respiratory or other related health problems.

"I think we all admit the housekeeping has not been as good as it could be or as we would like to see," said Graham.

The CCCS would like to see the site moved out of Schreiber, but Graham doesn't believe it should be shipped from one backyard to another. He said he believes if it is moved to an unpopulated area those working the site may become less attentive towards their duties.

"By keeping it in town, the workers know people are looking over their shoulders and will do a better job," said Graham.

His comments did little to ease the concerns of the CCCS who believe Graham is not fully aware of the situation.

Meanwhile, CP has taken some steps to reduce the amount of dust blowing from the site.

Neal Foot, assistant general manager operation and maintenance for CP, said a site manager will be put in place to ensure strict adherence to all operational guidelines. Additional steps being taken to reduce the amount of dust blowing off the site include periodic grading of the site, weekly washing of the concentrate pad and storage of waste water for subsequent disposal in an environmentally safe manner, treating unpaved portions of the facility with a dust reducing compound (calcium chloride), improving tarps used to cover any concentrate stored on site, installing linings in trucks to reduce noise while concentrates are being dumped onto the concrete pad, and constructing a

high-pressure water line to permit more frequent cleaning of the pad and vehicles using the site.

In addition, CP has hired a consulting firm from Guelph, Ontario (Rowan, Williams, Davies and Irwin Inc. to help determine what effective long-term dust-control measures may be needed.

A press release from CP said on site studies are expected to begin this week.

In addition, CP has met with the MOE who have requested a contingency plan should current changes to the operation not improve the situation.

CP is to have, and has promised this plan will be ready no later than September 1, 1989.

Joan Leblanc, secretary for the CCCS, commented to Foot, "If you can handle this responsibility you can come out looking like leaders in environmental conservation."

But Renaud said, "If it was done properly in the first place you wouldn't be having these problems now."

Schreiber Reeve Mike Cosgrove said, "the ministry is doing more than I thought they were and we're looking forward to the results from the hi-vol samples."

Murray concluded the meeting by saying, "It's important that you continue to voice your concerns. Let us know of things you see that you feel aren't right."



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