

Ministry of Transportation

Communications Branch

Frequently Asked Questions Niobium Cleanup Project

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is this project about? Why is this project needed?

The Ministry of Transportation (MTO), in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada, is launching a contamination site cleanup project.

A Niobium mine operated on the Manitou Islands on Lake Nipissing during the 1950s. The associated processing plant was set up on Nipissing First Nation lands and, over time, rock tailings were deposited within the First Nation land and at a former gravel pit owned by MTO. The rock tailings have contaminated the sites where they were deposited.

The two sites are:

- MTO Property – North side of Highway 17, Commanda Township
- Nipissing First Nation Property – Community of Yellek, Nipissing First Nation

In 2015, MTO committed to Nipissing First Nation and Indigenous Services Canada that the ministry would clean up its site as a joint project with Nipissing First Nation. A cost-sharing agreement is in place with Indigenous Services Canada to fund the Nipissing First Nation portion of the work.

Indigenous Services Canada and MTO will each fund cleanup and other associated work done on their respective property.

2. Are the tailings harmful to human health?

The Ministry completed a Human Health Risk Assessment in 2012 to determine the potential health impacts of the rock tailings and associated naturally occurring radioactive material (NORM).

The study concluded that the risks of the tailings to human health were low.

3. Are the tailings harmful to fish and other wildlife in the area?

The Human Health Risk Assessment indicated that the tailings are not harmful to fish and wildlife in the area, as they do not consume rock material. Further, testing of vegetation has shown no uptake of the contamination from the soil.

4. Are fish and wildlife caught in the area safe for human consumption?

There are no potential health impacts for consuming fish and wildlife in the vicinity of the tailings area.

5. What is the timing of the project?

Preparatory work (e.g. clearing the area, removing trees, constructing accesses to the sites, etc.) has commenced. The removal of contaminated soil is to begin in summer 2024.

The cleanup of MTO and Nipissing First Nation sites is expected to be complete by the end of 2025.

6. Where will the contaminated soil be disposed? Is there a proper disposal site?

In 2016, a potential disposal location was identified at the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area, northwest of Sudbury. Agnew Lake is an existing tailings facility managed by the Ministry of Mines (MOM), under license from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC).

7. What oversight does the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission provide?

The Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area is managed by the Ministry of Mines while the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) regulates the site by closely monitoring the maintenance and environmental performance. CNSC is reviewing the planned construction operations at the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area in accordance with the existing Waste Nuclear Substance License.

8. Who is funding this project and what are the costs involved?

In 2015, MTO committed to Nipissing First Nation, Indigenous Services Canada and Ministry of the Environment Conservation and Parks that it would clean up the two sites as a joint project with Nipissing First Nation.

MTO and Indigenous Services Canada will each fund contamination cleanup and associated work done on their respective property. A cost-sharing agreement is

in place with Indigenous Services Canada to fund the Nipissing First Nation portion of the work.

Work on the haul route and disposal site will be split based on the proportion of work at each contamination site. The split is 65% Nipissing First Nation and 35% MTO. The estimated cost is \$12.8 million, with \$4.6 million for the MTO portion and \$8.2 million for the Nipissing First Nation portion.

This project includes the supply and installation of a new temporary modular bridge. The new bridge will be installed in 2025. Funding for the construction of the new bridge at Ministic Creek will be split 50/50 between MTO and Indigenous Services Canada. The installation of the new bridge will improve future long-term access to the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area.

9. Are First Nations involved with the site cleanup?

A cost sharing agreement was implemented for design and construction relating to each contaminated site to be paid by the owner. Indigenous Services Canada is funding the Nipissing First Nation portion.

The Nipissing Miller Partnership was awarded the contract in July 2023.

10. Why has it taken so long to begin the project?

In 2015, MTO committed to Nipissing First Nation and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) that the ministry would clean up its site as a joint project with Nipissing First Nation. Since then, the ministry has worked to secure the funding agreement with ISC, consulted with numerous stakeholders, and completed technical work to ensure the safe transportation and disposal of the contaminated soil. In October 2020, while reviewing the haul road access to Agnew Lake, it was discovered that a large culvert crossing Ministic Creek was severely damaged. Engineers determined that the damaged culvert needed to be replaced. This project includes the supply and installation of a new temporary modular bridge. The new bridge will be installed in 2025.

11. What are the environmental risks associated with the removal of the contaminated soil? Is the community at risk?

There are no health and safety risks to the community from undertaking the clean-up.

The ministry has included appropriate environmental and health and safety provisions in the contract to safely complete the work and carefully manage environmental and land impacts. Provisions in the contract include but are not limited to Health and Safety Plans at the originating and receiving sites, Dust

Management Plans, and Soils Management Plans, with qualified professionals supervising the work in accordance with protection measures.

The ministry is committed to the health and safety of all those involved, including Nipissing First Nation community members.

The naturally occurring radiation is low level and the material that is excavated will be carefully contained during transport. A qualified professional will be on hand to supervise the work and to ensure the environmental protection and containment measures are working as designed.

12. What are the benefits of adding NORM as cover thickness at the tailings site?

Given the low level of radioactive elements that are exhibited by the rock tailings, they will be used to increase the existing cover thickness at the Agnew Lake Tailings Management Area, reducing the overall radioactive exposure at the site.

13. Has information about this planned work been communicated to the community?

The ministry and Nipissing First Nation (NFN) have been working collaboratively on this clean-up project for a number of years. Given the nature of the project, NFN has proactively taken a lead role in outreach to community members about the planned work. The ministry is supporting NFN by providing information as needed and has attended community meetings to offer information and updates.

The work anticipated in summer 2024 includes the clean-up of 4 residential properties within Nipissing First Nation. Recently, NFN set-up meetings with each of the impacted residents prior to work starting. The meetings were attended by NFN, the contractor and MTO.