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The abandoned Surro copper mine has been identified as a source of copper leaching into the Jordan River, 70 km west of Victoria. After declaring remediation of the site was satisfactory in 1993, the province has now ordered the present owner to remediate the site. *STEVEN HUME*

B.C.'s failures on mining pollution leaving taxpayers on the hook

Copper tailings in the Jordan River just latest example of poor oversight



STEPHEN HUME

A pipeline used for the submarine disposal of tailings from a now abandoned copper mine has contaminated sand, sediments and shellfish at a popular regional park heavily used by surfers, bikers and picnickers.

University of Victoria graduate student Caleb Kelly found evidence of contamination when sampling sediments at the river's estuary while researching a master's thesis studying the potential for placer metals recovery in 1991, two years before the provincial government declared the site fully remediated.

Tailings from a six-kilometre discharge pipe used in the 1960s and a submarine pipe added in the 1970s to dispose of waste from the mine two kilometres upstream were identified as the source. Tailings then migrated to contaminate Sunset Beach, now a regional park.

Another report in 2008 by University of Victoria scientist Derek Ellis described the Jordan River tailings disposal system as

"an example of how not to design, build and use submarine tailings disposal."

"The Jordan River copper mine was permitted to use very shallow submarine tailings pipelines on a wave-exposed coast," Ellis said. "In hindsight this was obviously a mistake. The pipeline broke several times and although all but the last break was repaired, much of the tailings drifted ashore and contaminated shellfish."

Discovered in 1953, the Surro Mine passed through numerous iterations and owners. During peak production it extracted about 1,000 tonnes a day and milled the ore in an underground cavern, refining copper, gold and silver concentrates.

Over the decade before it ceased production in 1975, the mine milled about 1.5 million tonnes of ore. Production was interrupted in 1963 when a blow-out resulted in flooding of the underground. At that time a large

volume of material was ejected from the mine onto the banks and into the river.

In 1977, the B.C. government investigated the site. Despite the known pipeline breaks, tailings escape and a tailings dump located where it could erode directly into the river, in 1993 the province issued a letter saying "Final reclamation carried out and found satisfactory."

Recent sampling has since found copper concentrations downstream — on the abandoned mine that consistently exceed levels prohibited for contaminated sites. In some cases, concentrations are measured at levels 300 per cent higher than the maximum allowable standard.

Last week B.C. mines minister, Bill Bennett, told *Vancouver Times* columnist reporter Amy Smart he didn't know why a high-risk mine site leaching copper into a salmon-bearing river had been given a clean bill of health.

It wasn't the first time Bennett, who's not running in the next election, has been blindsided by regulatory failure within his ministry.

When a massive breach at the Mt. Polley mine near Quesnel in 2012 spilled millions of cubic metres of tailings into a critical

salmon-producing watershed on the upper Fraser River, a scathing report from Carol Briffinger, the province's auditor-general, concluded that "The Ministry of Energy and Mines and Ministry of Environment compliance and enforcement activities of the mining sector are inadequate to protect the province from significant environmental risk."

"Almost all of the expectations for robust compliance and enforcement program were not met," she said.

Now we discover that the high-risk Jordan River site was so far off the province's regulatory radar that it wasn't even listed in the government's report on a 10-mile drainage.

The province has ordered the mine's present owner to remediate the site (clicking an e-mail "pollen or poop" prize). But whether that deserves any more confidence than the failed enforcement identified by the auditor-general remains the question.

Why should it? Mining companies haven't provided government with enough financial security deposits to cover potential reclamation costs should they default. In fact, the auditor-general says the fund has a \$1 billion shortfall.

Mining Watch, a national environmental organization, says in its 2016 report there are more than 1,200 open-pit mines in the province, only 7% of which fall under private responsibility for cleanup. It estimates unfunded reclamation liability for taxpayers at more than \$2 billion.

Meanwhile, over the past decade, mining companies in B.C. have carried about \$82 billion in gross revenues.

Look, the mining sector is critical to the provincial economy. We need one that's healthy and vigorous. But it's unfair to industry to suggest that British Columbians clearly deserve a better model than one in which shareholders take profits while taxpayers get the environmental bill.

And it's unfair to ask the province, who's exactly maintaining the store and why the watchdog is doing what's long left.

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Property Tax Exemptions for 2017

The City of Vancouver hereby gives notice of the reduction of City taxes on exempt entities in 2017, including gas parcels of the amount of City taxes that would be imposed without the exemption for 2017 and the following two years (2017 taxation year).

A copy will be brought forward to Council on October 18, 2016 in accordance with Section 238(C)(1) of the Vancouver Charter.

NAME	RPOID	ESTIMATED TAXES		
		2017 (\$)	2018 (\$)	2019 (\$)
Baptist Foundation of BC	249-772-24-0000	14,000	14,500	14,800
Baptist Foundation of BC	785-288-08-0000	75,300	76,300	76,300
Baptist Housing Society of BC	631-212-04-0000	75,300	77,500	79,800
Breath Care Homes Society	634-300-80-0000	24,400	25,200	26,000
Breath Care Homes Society	634-300-82-0000	24,400	25,200	26,400
Breath Care Homes Society	634-300-84-0000	32,200	33,200	34,200
Breath Care Homes Society	634-300-86-0000	22,400	23,400	24,400
Breath Care Homes Society	710-072-06-0000	44,600	45,900	47,500
Chau Leun Fun Bok Society of Vancouver	180-592-92-0000	18,300	18,500	18,700
Christ Church of China	382-582-04-0000	9,200	9,500	10,000
Coalition of Churches Association	536-712-45-0000	20,300	21,000	21,600
French Canadian Real Home Association	628-251-84-0000	13,500	13,600	13,800
French Canadian Real Home Association	628-258-08-0000	6,800	6,700	6,900
HPC Housing Foundation	638-077-07-0000	9,300	9,700	10,000
HPC Housing Foundation	648-078-26-0000	9,200	9,400	9,700
HPC Housing Foundation	648-184-47-0000	9,200	9,600	9,900
HPC Housing Foundation	647-214-20-0000	9,300	9,800	10,100
HPC Housing Foundation	648-208-68-0000	6,400	6,600	6,800
HPC Housing Foundation	670-220-83-0000	4,800	5,000	5,200
HPC Housing Foundation	670-220-88-0000	4,400	4,600	4,800
HPC Housing Foundation	689-220-82-0000	5,500	5,700	5,900
HPC Housing Foundation	722-583-48-0000	23,800	24,700	25,600
HPC Housing Foundation	605-173-48-0000	12,900	13,200	13,700
HPC Housing Foundation	710-077-07-0000	29,800	30,500	31,300
HPC Housing Foundation	817-300-23-0000	9,200	9,600	9,800
Homeless Association	785-237-81-0000	47,900	42,400	42,600
Homeless Association	770-870-85-0000	9,800	12,200	12,400
New Chinese Society	699-353-84-0000	34,600	36,800	38,700
Old Peoples Home Society	158-725-04-0000	10,800	10,900	11,000
Relay of St. Paul Vancouver Housing Society	608-117-44-0000	28,400	30,300	31,200
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Vancouver	186-186-49-0000	10,000	10,300	10,800
Society for Christian Care of Vancouver	613-118-54-0000	73,800	76,000	78,300
Southwest Club of Vancouver BC	687-687-84-0000	10,000	10,300	10,800
Southwest Housing Society	244-828-26-0000	9,300	9,400	9,600
The WIL Housing Society	577-239-28-0000	8,500	8,800	9,100
The WIL Housing Society	588-250-04-0000	6,000	6,200	6,400
Van Weeren Senior Citizens Housing Society	309-810-89-0000	9,700	10,000	10,300
Van Weeren Senior Citizens Housing Society	309-811-08-0000	8,700	8,900	9,200
Vancouver Women's Shelter Citizens Housing Society	125-612-84-0000	14,000	14,300	14,900
TOTAL		797,600	795,700	804,000

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Property Tax Office 604-671-5885