

MEMBER STATEMENT—KEVIN O'REILLY MLA FRAME LAKE

ARSENIC REMEDIATION GUIDELINES

May 27, 2021

MR. O'REILLY: Merci, Monsieur le President. An interesting study was recently released summarizing extensive soil sampling for arsenic covering much of the Slave Geological Province including the Yellowknife area. Thanks to local resident Mike Palmer who worked with Queen's University Professor Heather Jamieson for this work. Using a combination of mineralogical analysis and statistical and geospatial analysis, they showed conclusively that in soils around Yellowknife and up to 20 kilometres away, most of the arsenic came from mining. Arsenic contamination persists even after more than 60 years after most of it was released from gold roasting operations. There is some evidence of arsenic slowly dissipating, but it will be with us for many years, if not forever. Background levels of arsenic in the Slave Geological Province were found to be in the range of 0.25 to 15 ppm and as high as 30 ppm for the type of rock around Yellowknife, comparable to findings everywhere else on the planet.

Some of you are asking, So what? Some previous work had claimed that the natural background levels of arsenic in rock around Yellowknife were much higher, 150 ppm or 5 to 10 times what this new and much more thorough study shows. That old work was done by consultants and a group called Yellowknife Arsenic Soil Remediation Committee in the early 2000s. In 2003 GNWT set arsenic remediation guidelines for soils at 160 ppm for residential use and 340 ppm for industrial use. I objected to those guidelines and believed that they were too high and not protective enough. The nationally accepted standard was and still is 12 ppm.

I have received numerous assurances that the 2003 arsenic remediation standards would be reviewed. I'm still waiting, and this new study that shows the background levels should be no more than 30 ppm rather than 150 ppm as previously claimed, there is an even stronger case now to review these outdated remediation guidelines.

I'll have questions later today for the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources and what the plans are for moving reviewing the 2003 arsenic remediation guidelines, the implications for current remediation work at Giant, and for property owners in this city. Mahsi, Mr. Speaker.