

Nunatsiaq News,  
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Dear Editor:

The Saskatchewan Mining Association (SMA) would like to respond to comments reported from uranium mining opponents during a meeting held at Iqaluit, Nunavut on November 18. While our activities are focused within Saskatchewan, misinformation spread by opponents to uranium development in other regions has the potential to adversely affect the Saskatchewan exploration and mining industry.

The public deserves a balanced set of facts on the potential benefits and effects of developing uranium resources. Opponents to uranium mining use a combination of dated information, information presented out of context, unsubstantiated facts, and errors of omission to make their arguments more dramatic and sensational. For a relevant picture of how uranium mining could affect people in Nunavut, we look to the current operation of mines in northern Saskatchewan. The mines and mills of the Athabasca Basin now provide about one-fifth of world uranium production.

These mines are among Canada's safest and provide economic benefits to Saskatchewan's north. The SMA encourages people to review fact sheets related to workplace safety and economic contribution found on our website ([www.saskmining.ca](http://www.saskmining.ca)). Northerners, the vast majority of them Aboriginal Canadians, make up about half of the workforce at these mines, which also purchase hundreds of millions of dollars worth of goods and services from northern-owned businesses each year. For example, in 2008, mines spent over \$292 M on purchases of goods and services from northern Saskatchewan businesses and approximately \$63 M on payroll to employees from northern Saskatchewan for a total direct annual economic contribution of \$355 M in the north.

Beyond sharing the economic benefits, the people of northern Saskatchewan also share the responsibility of protecting the environment. Northerners are involved in independent organizations that conduct their own environmental monitoring programs and meet regularly with industry to share information and address issues.

Though we understand that a lot of misleading information was presented at the Iqaluit meeting, we feel compelled to respond to the three most misleading suggestions as reported in the Nunatsiaq News on Nov. 21, 2010.

First is activist Helen Caldicott's effort to infect others with her irrational fear of radiation. She told us that one alpha particle "can kill you." Caldicott presents her information out of context to suggest that since radiation has the ability to cause cancer, then any increased exposure to radiation is an unacceptable risk. She fails to mention that we are all exposed to natural background radiation all of the time, that uranium is found everywhere, and that we all inhale alpha emitting particles into our lungs with every breath we breathe. A similar statement would be that "one breath of air can kill you". The nuclear industry manages exposure to radiation based on the recommendations of

the International Commission on Radiological Protection, which was formed by the international medical community.

Caldicott's underlying suggestion is that since uranium mining involves radiation, it cannot be mined safely. Uranium is safely mined around the world, including in Canada. Radiation exposure is closely monitored and carefully regulated. The health of uranium workers has been extensively studied and the conclusion is that the risk from radiation exposure for people working at modern uranium mining facilities is comparable to that for the general public.

Second, of particular concern was the statement that uranium mining in Saskatchewan has affected caribou. Opponents to the uranium industry do not acknowledge the work of the many scientists working within government and industry who devote their careers to the protection of the environment. The industry and government fully understands and respects the importance of caribou for people in Canada's north, and are working continually to protect them.

Ongoing monitoring programs and studies in northern Saskatchewan have neither predicted nor found effects on caribou related to uranium mining. Flesh tissue samples from caribou harvested in the vicinity of six northern communities, one of which is in the immediate proximity of a uranium mine, are analyzed regularly as part of independent monitoring programs directed by northerners. Caribou are known to have naturally higher amounts of radioactive elements in their bodies than other animals. This reflects the amount of these elements that is naturally in the lichen, a key part of the caribou diet in the north.

And finally, there was the suggestion that uranium currently mined in Canada will be used in weapons. Today, Canada's uranium is produced exclusively for peaceful uses, primarily for the generation of electricity at nuclear power stations here and around the world. These stations produce about 14% of the world's electricity. Exports of uranium are tightly controlled under international treaties and Canada's own laws to ensure that it is used for peaceful purposes.

The SMA is proud of the contribution that uranium mining companies make to environmental stewardship, and the protection of worker and public health. We believe this to be reflected in the public support of the industry. After nearly six decades of uranium mining in Saskatchewan, public opinion polls shows that about 80% of people living in the north, where the mines are located, support the industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the misinformation presented at the November 18 meeting in Iqaluit.

Yours sincerely,



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Saskatchewan Mining Association