

Victoria Gold heap leach failure

information sheet

Overview

On June 24, 2024, a failure occurred at the heap leach facility of the Eagle Gold Mine operated by Victoria Gold Corporation. The Government of Yukon has been treating the response as a government priority reflecting the urgency of the situation. Our priority is to ensure the health and wellbeing of Yukoners and to protect the environment.

The technical teams of the Yukon government and the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun meet on a regular basis to inform remediation work.

An independent review is being conducted to identify the cause of the failure and contributing factors, which may include: design, construction, operation, maintenance, and monitoring of the facility.

PricewaterhouseCoopers, the court-appointed receiver, is now in control of the mine site. The receiver is undertaking remediation work with the input and approval of the Yukon government and is responsible for implementing all directions issued by the Government of Yukon and federal regulators. The appointment of the receiver does not prevent the possibility of future operations at the Eagle Gold Mine – the goal right now is to address the failure of the heap leach facility and mitigate its impacts.

The Yukon government will continue to serve as the main regulator and enforcement body for the mine site.



What is a heap leach operation?

At a heap leach operation, ore is dug from an open pit, crushed, and then piled on a protective liner. A cyanide solution is dripped on the ore to dissolve the gold. The gold-cyanide solution is collected at the bottom of the heap, then sent to an on-site plant where the gold and cyanide are separated, and the cyanide solution is reused.

What happened during the failure and why?

A landslide occurred on the ore stacked in the heap leach facility. The slide caused ore to spill over the embankment at the base of the facility and into the creek.

The landslide was about 1.5 km long and involved about 4 million tonnes of material. An estimated 2 million tonnes went past the barriers.

What are you doing to support workers of the mine?

We know this is a difficult time. We want to ensure workers, and the public are aware of the Employment Standards Office and have access to support.

Under the Yukon's Employment Standards Act, an employer is permitted to lay off employees temporarily for up to 13 weeks in a 20-week period, or for a time set by the Director of Employment Standards.

Former Victoria Gold employees can contact Service Canada regarding employment insurance.

Former employees who are owed wages have 6 months from the date the wages were due to file a wage complaint with the Employment Standards Office.

The receiver is gathering the required information on all former employees who may be eligible to participate in the Wage Earner Protection Program administered by Service Canada.

Once this is finalized, all eligible employees will receive a notice from the receiver outlining the amounts eligible to be claimed through the program, and instructions on how to apply.

All former eligible employees have been granted an extension up to December 26, 2024, to submit applications to Service Canada.

Additional information can be found at the receiver's website.

<https://www.pwc.com/ca/en/services/insolvency-assignments/victoria-gold.html>.



Anyone with questions can contact:

Employment Standards Office

307 Black Street, 1st floor, Whitehorse, Yukon

Phone 867-667-5944, or

Toll-free in the Yukon: 1-800-661-0408, or

by email at eso@yukon.ca.

What supports are available for people experiencing distress due to the heap leach failure?

The situation at the Victoria Gold mine may be causing emotional or psychological distress for those who live or work in the area. Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services provides rapid access counselling appointments for all Yukoners. Anyone can call 866-456-3838 to book an appointment with a counsellor within 3 days.

Is water safe to drink?

The drinking water in Mayo is safe to drink, with no contamination to the water supply wells. Environmental Health authorities are closely monitoring the situation. There is no indication that private wells located downstream from the mine site are affected by the mine failure. Residents are advised to monitor their water quality through routine testing, particularly for heavy metals and cyanide.

Following the failure at the Eagle Gold mine, dams were built to contain contaminated water. There is ongoing testing for cyanide and heavy metals like arsenic, mercury, and cadmium in the surrounding environment. Currently, the level of contamination detected in the environment does not pose health risks to humans, but cyanide and heavy metal levels are being carefully observed in water bodies. The Canadian Drinking Water Guidelines have set the maximum acceptable concentration of cyanide in drinking water to 0.2 mg/L.

Cyanide is a toxin that can be harmful in large quantities, but cyanide does not build up in the tissue of animals or fish. Residents are advised not to drink surface water or consume fish from the immediate area around the mine. There are no current concerns about eating wildlife from the surrounding area.

Contaminants in water, including cyanide, may diminish over time through natural processes. Current data suggests minimal risks to human health, but potential long-term impacts are still under review.

Residents concerned about exposure to contaminants are encouraged to contact their healthcare provider if they experience symptoms.



Fish monitoring

Biologists are continuing to monitor fish in the Haggart Creek watershed downstream of the Eagle Gold mine.

Tissue samples from collected fish will be analyzed for heavy metal contamination, including arsenic, cadmium, lead and mercury to help us establish baseline tissue levels for these metals. Analysis will begin soon, with results expected by early 2025.

Water monitoring

We are collecting water samples to monitor water quality downstream of the Eagle Gold mine site. Water samples are analyzed for levels of cyanide, metals and other contaminants and results are compared to relevant guidelines for the protection of aquatic life. This program was developed in collaboration with the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun.

Water monitoring in the area is ongoing and results are published regularly as they become available. Results are posted online <https://yukon.ca/en/victoria-gold-updates/environmental-monitoring>.

Wildlife monitoring

The Department of Environment's Animal Health Unit and the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun are asking hunters harvesting moose and caribou north of Mayo to collect liver, kidney, muscle and incisor bar samples and submit them for analysis of heavy metal levels in tissues and determination of age.

Current information shows no evidence that the mine failure has made animals unsafe to eat.

Hunters will not receive results on their individual submissions. The testing will establish baseline data, and through continued monitoring, help us determine if the levels of heavy metals in caribou and moose tissues change over time. Preliminary results from this study are expected by early 2025.

Hunters can pick up sampling kits from Environment district offices in Mayo, Dawson and Whitehorse and from the First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun Lands office in Mayo. The Government of Yukon is offering hunters their choice of meat bags or a thermos as a token of appreciation for participation in this voluntary program. Contact us at animalhealth@yukon.ca or 867-667-5600 if you have questions or concerns.