

# ABORIGINAL AND NORTHERN INVOLVEMENT AND BENEFITS FROM GUNNAR URANIUM MINE ENVIRONMENTAL REMEDIATION –NORTHERN SASKATCHEWAN

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## 1. INTRODUCTION –MINE SITE AND HISTORY

The Saskatchewan Research Council (SRC) was contracted by the Province of Saskatchewan to manage the remediation of 37 abandoned uranium mine sites in northern Saskatchewan with the Gunnar mine and milling site being the largest and most complex. Decommissioning was limited to flooding the pit and capping the mine shaft. Risk assessments were carried out during the licence application and review processes and in 2010 it was determined that the degraded nature of the buildings on-site posed an unacceptable physical hazard to public safety. These buildings were demolished in 2011/12 with debris stored on the original footprint for final disposal once the environmental assessment and licensing processes were completed. Due to the limited information available on this legacy mine site, it was not economically feasible to collect all required technical information to fully inform the environmental review and licensing processes. As a result, in close consultation with the regulatory agencies, SRC developed a decision tree approach that allowed a sequenced determination of detailed remediation plans for the four major components of the site: tailings areas, waste rock, demolition debris and associated materials, and the open pit. The environmental assessment and licensing approvals were obtained in 2014/15.

## 2. SRC'S APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT/INVOLVEMENT

The most important component of engagement is that of commitment from the entire organization both top-down and bottom-up. As an example, before the contract was signed between the Province of Saskatchewan and SRC, the President and CEO of SRC personally became involved with the project meeting with the key community members and in the meetings that established a Project Review Committee comprised of designated community representatives. This committee was established well in advance of any regulated timeframes for community involvement. A full-time position was established within the SRC remediation team to collaborate with both SRC employees and the northern communities. SRC employees have become fully invested in this process which has resulted in a bottom-up program development and continuous improvement.

## 3. INITIAL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Multiple and meaningful interactions starting at the initial planning stages and continuing through the setting of project objectives, project review and approval stages, implementation and post-monitoring are crucial to successful community engagement. To the end of 2015, SRC has held over 130 community meetings with northern people living in the region. It is critical in these processes to ensure that input from these interactions is obtained and actions taken within the project development and implementation that demonstrates active listening.

## 4. COMMUNITY ECONOMIC INVOLVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

The direct involvement of communities in the delivery of services required to remediate the Gunnar mine site was/is a critical component of successful engagement. SRC's procurement team developed detailed criteria for selecting the contractors that would deliver the various components of the remediation project. The criteria included significant weighting to ensure local residents would be trained, employed in, and benefit from the remediation work. To assist with this process a designate from the area was appointed to the procurement decision-making panel. Advance training was provided to not only assist the local residents gain employment in specific remediation work but to equip them to be successful pursuing other similar employment opportunities once the remediation work was/is complete. Community liaisons were designated (through the contractors) to assist in the development and designation of employment opportunities. Some Northern people are being trained in monitoring to ensure longer term project involvement. A mentorship program

has also been developed to help train post-secondary Aboriginal students in science and engineering thereby increasing the number of highly qualified people that could be engaged in the remediation work.

#### 5. CURRENT STATUS OF PROJECT

The phase II license, which allows the remediation to begin, is expected in late 2015/early 2016. The remediation plans for the other site components will be finalized and implemented in a coordinated fashion to maximize community engagement as well as program efficiency and effectiveness.

#### 6. SUMMARY

In order to be successful in meaningful community engagement, a total commitment to the process must be developed and maintained. Capacity, patience and genuine goodwill determine success. Input must be collected and actioned in ways that are evident to those who participate and those directly impacted by the project activities. Employees involved with the project must feel engaged and empowered to carry out the engagement activities and to be fully successful must be motivated and passionate. In all stages of the project implementation and post-monitoring, community engagement and direct involvement in the project will remain a high priority.

## Country or International Organization

Canada

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Yes

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