

Govt speeds up plans to remediate site in NWT

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Remediation of an abandoned weather station in the Northwest Territories could get under way by summer 2011.

The federal government has added Mould Bay Weather Station to the hundreds of assessment projects being proposed under the accelerated Federal Contaminated Sites Action Plan (FCSAP).

The FCSAP aims to reduce the environmental and health risks of known or suspected contaminated sites on government land. In the 2009-2010 federal budget, an additional \$80 million was allocated to the FCSAP to accelerate site assessments and management programs.

Until now, remediation plans for Mould Bay have been far from accelerated.

The former weather monitoring station on the west coast of Prince Patrick Island was active from 1948 until 1997, when the then-Liberal government shut it down.

Environment Canada wanted “sufficient flexibility” to reopen Mould Bay in the future, said Tracy Lacroix-Wilson, a spokesperson with Environment Canada.

So it wasn't until 2002 that a decision was made to decommission the site, and then, decommissioning was also delayed.

“This government will act where previous governments failed,” said federal Environment Minister Jim Prentice in a news release.

“I have asked my officials to proceed quickly on the clean-up of this shameful situation that has been allowed to linger since 2002,” he said.

It's not known yet if Mould Bay is contaminated, but Lacroix-Wilson said that, “the presence of fuel storage does warrant further examination.”

A Phase I environmental site assessment was conducted in 2007 and Lacroix-Wilson said that so far, water samples from the site do not exceed environmental quality guidelines.

Before further intrusive work, Environment Canada will conduct an archaeological study in summer 2009 — a territorial requirement for sites suspected of having archeological significance.

A Phase II/III environmental site assessment, including a full inspection of the fuel storage facilities, is planned for summer 2010.

Analytical results from the assessment will determine whether soil, surface water, and permafrost groundwater are contaminated, Lacroix-Wilson said.

Then, further action like human health risk assessments, remedial action plans, mitigation, and long-term monitoring, could be required.

Once the site is fully decommissioned, it will be turned over to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, federal custodian of the Crown land.

Lacroix-Wilson said it's too soon to say how much the project could cost, or how many people the process could involve.

She noted that a recent FSCAP remediation project in Nunavut provided more than 5,000 person-days of employment, of which over 90 per cent went to Inuit.

The FOX-C former Distant Early Warning Line Site on the east coast of Baffin Island, Nunavut had been abandoned since 1963. There were polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the building paints, the buildings, and site litter. Soil at the site was also contaminated with hydrocarbons and heavy metals.

Inuit-owned Qikiqtaaluk Corporation secured the \$12-million remediation contract, as well as a \$4.9-million camp construction contract.

Remediation took place from 2006 to 2008 and included removing hazardous material, demolishing contaminated infrastructure, and excavating, treating, and/or disposing of soil with PCBs and other contaminants.

More information on FSCAP projects is available at the government's website.