



Rethinking Remediation at Giant Mine

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- ◆ Since the closure of Giant Mine in 2000, a series of technical remediation plans have been proposed to address the mine's significant environmental legacies. However, the remediation of Giant Mine *also* brings up controversial questions of historical harms, community engagement, future land uses, and long-term care.
- ◆ These controversial questions lead me to investigate why the initial remediation planning process failed to secure public trust in the 2007 Remediation Plan, and what has happened since.
- ◆ For this research, I participated in the Giant Mine Surface Design Workshop, sat in on meetings with the Yellowknife Dene's Giant Mine Advisory Committee and the Giant Mine Oversight Board and interviewed multiple community stakeholders, project team employees and regulators. I also analyzed public documents, including technical studies, public hearings and the Giant Mine Remediation Environmental Assessment.

RESEARCH FINDINGS: THE GIANT MINE MONSTER

- ◆ Throughout meetings and interviews, the arsenic at Giant Mine was often referred to as an underground 'monster.' My analysis suggests that, when looking at remediation, the Giant Mine Monster can be seen as more than just an arsenic trioxide problem. It is a **multi-headed monster**, and includes issues of colonization, mistrust, and community engagement.
- ◆ Therefore, my research tracks how this 'monster' was created, why the initial plan for arsenic remediation was rejected by the community, and how the project has been re-orientated to confront and care for the mine site, the environment and the relationships between the people affected.

1. CREATING THE MONSTER

- ◆ Historically, little was done to communicate health risks to the community or to plan for closure, remediation and reclamation.
- ◆ In this way, the Giant Mine created both an arsenic monster and a monster of public mistrust.
- ◆ Several interviewees reflected that this complicated history results in negative feelings towards the remediation project and they suggest that the project needs to confront this history more directly.

2. CONTAINING THE MONSTER

- ◆ When the government took over responsibility of the mine in 2000, they focused on containing the arsenic. They overlooked issues of mistrust, historical injustices, and communication.
- ◆ Not only did this approach focus on containing the arsenic, it **contained knowledge**. The government project determined what knowledge was and wasn't relevant and how the community could be involved.
- ◆ Interviewees argued that because the government defined the remediation project in isolation from a community context, the technical remediation plan failed to address community concerns such as future land use and long-term care.



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◆ For more information on the history of Giant Mine and the ongoing remediation process, or to read research blogs on these topics, please visit the **Toxic Legacies Project** website: <http://www.toxiclegacies.com/>

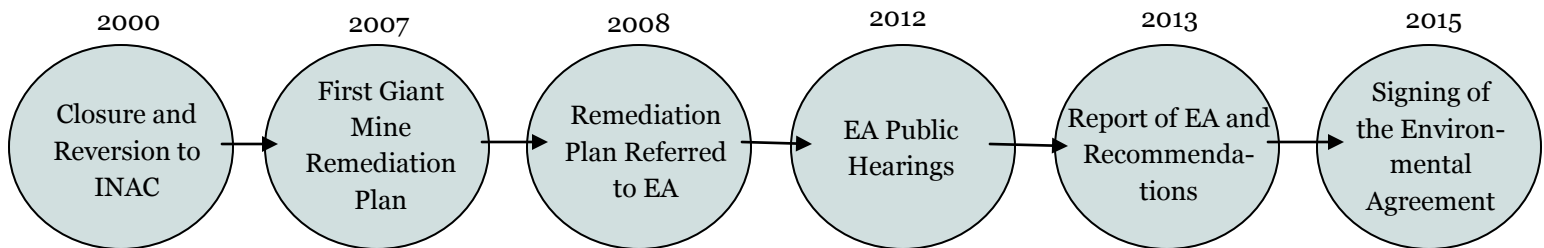


Yellowknife Dene First Nations, Giant Mine Healing Ceremony, September 2013

3. CONFRONTING AND CARING FOR THE MONSTER

- ◆ The Giant Mine Environmental Assessment (EA) provided a platform for community stakeholders to voice their concerns and to see these concerns reflected in 26 binding measures, resulting in the signing of an environmental agreement and the creation of the Giant Mine Oversight Board.
- ◆ The majority of interviewees reflected that the EA improved remediation planning.
- ◆ While the fundamental technical design aspects of the project have changed little, the process of how remediation is discussed, planned for and defined has been altered significantly. In this sense, the EA was a process of trust and communication building.
- ◆ The Giant Mine case illustrates the potential for community activism to shift remediation in order to **confront social issues** such as environmental injustice and to care for people and the environment through **reconciliation and intergenerational equity**.

TIMELINE OF REMEDIATION AT GIANT MINE



GOING FORWARD:

- ◆ While interviewees generally agreed that the process of remediation planning at Giant Mine has improved in the last few years, several people raised questions regarding environmental justice and reconciliation, alongside uncertainties about future land use and perpetual care of the mine site.
- ◇ **Environmental Justice:** While remediation projects are sometimes seen as **inherently 'good' processes** because they are cleaning up toxins, they can in fact **perpetuate environmental injustice** if they do not provide adequate space for community opinions and decision making. For several interviewees, environmental justice is closely connected to reconciliation.
- ◇ **Reconciliation :** Many interviewees see the Giant Mine Remediation Project as more than just the management of arsenic, but also as an opportunity to confront and repair historically negative relationships between people and the land. However, for the YKDFN more specifically, reconciliation means a lot more than repairing relationships. It is a call for an official apology and compensation.
- ◇ **Future Land Use and Perpetual Care:** The arsenic monster could be underground at Giant forever and the community wants to remember what happened there. In addition, it is unclear how 'off site' contamination will be managed. Interviewees suggests that the project must begin to think beyond the actual act of remediation to include meaningful discussion on the spread of contamination, future land uses and perpetual care.

REMEDICATION AS RELATIONAL

- ◆ **Remediation is a creative opportunity** to confront historical injustices and to negotiate how the space will be remembered, valued and cared for in the future.
- ◆ In order to **rethink remediation**, my thesis research argues that the current approach to mine remediation can be changed from a focus on site containment to include an emphasis on broader issues such as **community engagement, reconciliation, healing and caring for the land**.

CONTACT US

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