

# B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting  
British Columbia's Community Water  
Supply Sources

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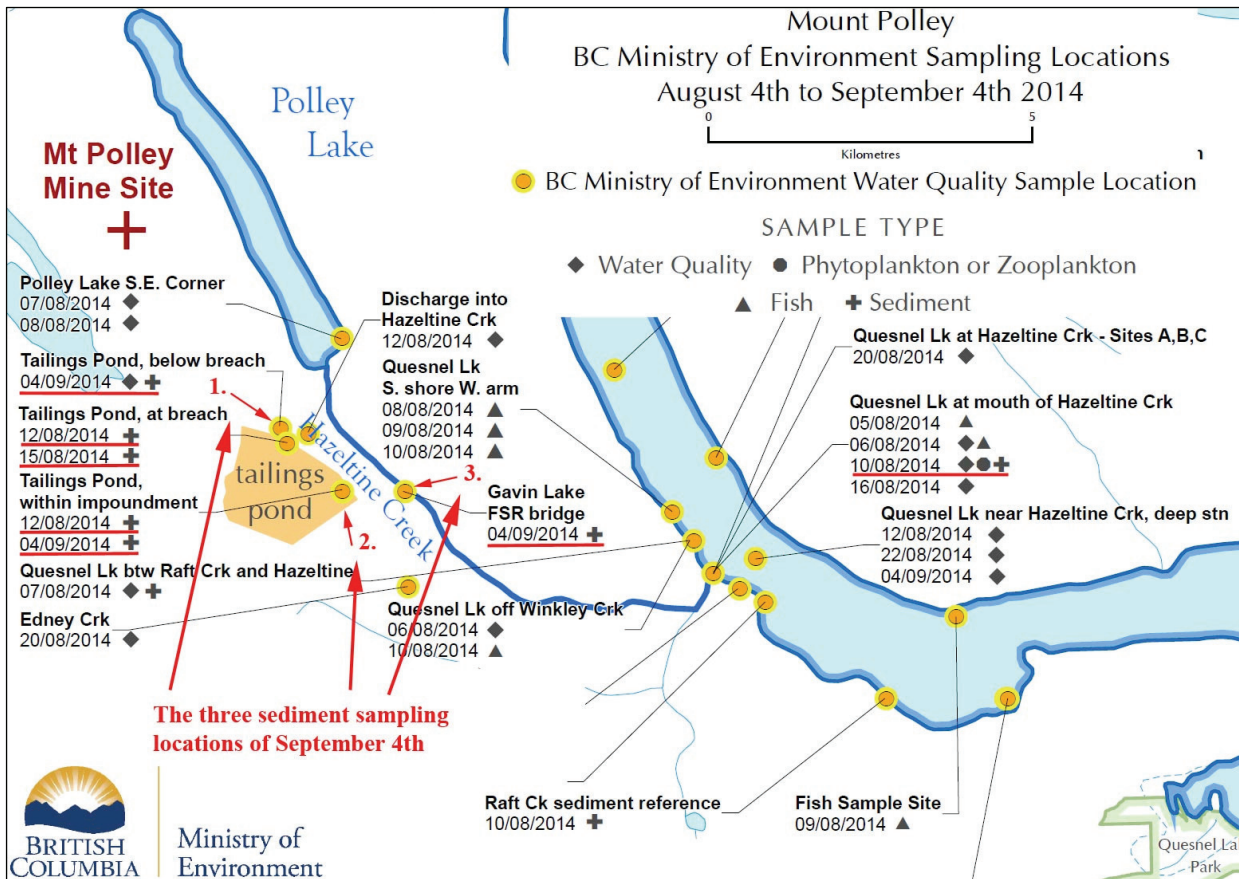


September 25, 2014

Media Release

## Alliance Finds BC Environment Ministry Sediment Sampling of Mount Polley Mine Disaster Zone Woefully Inadequate: Ministry Stalls on Declaring Zone a “Contaminated Site”

*Vancouver:* Exactly one month after the August 4, 2014 Mount Polley mine tailings dam breach that destroyed, inundated and contaminated an 8 kilometre long and wide swath of Crown Land forests and soils in the Hazeltine Creek watershed, and dumped an unknown large volume of the mine's tailings sludge into Quesnel Lake, the BC Ministry of Environment (MoE) collected only three additional samples of tailings slurry sediments in the enormous inundated zone. One sample was within the breached Tailings Facility itself, one at the former toe of the Facility's dam, and one about a kilometre below the breach area. (The three sampling locations are identified in the MoE's *Sampling Locations* map below.)



Two of the samples were taken inside the area controlled by the Mineral leases of Mount Polley Mine (note: by definition a mine site is already considered a contaminated area), while only one sample was taken outside of those leases, that is, on Crown Land (see sample # 3 on map, in red).

[Late Wednesday afternoon \(5:30 pm\), September 24th, the MoE released the results of the three September 4th slurry sediment samples on its website](#) which is dedicated to monitoring the Mount Polley disaster. In the data it found elevated concentrations of toxic heavy metals: copper, selenium, and manganese.

Prior, the Ministry collected a total of four slurry sediment samples with similar results: one on August 10th at the mid-mouth of Hazeltine Creek; two on August 12th at the mine's Tailings Facility; and one on August 15th at the Tailings Facility. From August 12th to September 4th, only a total of two sediment samples were taken on Crown Lands outside of the lands leased by Imperial Metals.

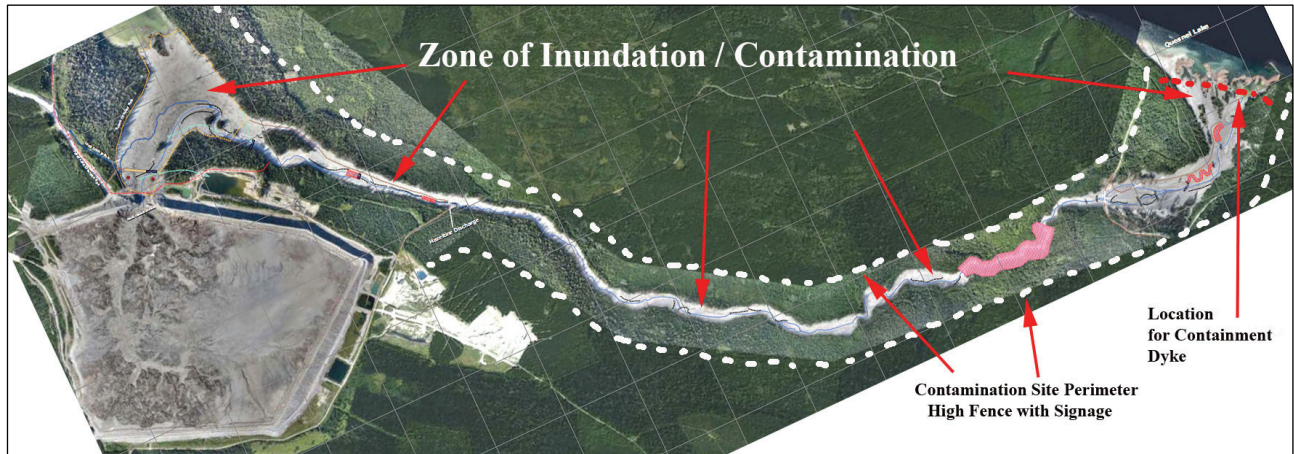
The Ministry's meagre collection is inadequate and disappointing, as it fails to meet the public's expectation of a full investigation of an environmental crime scene. The mining company, Imperial Metals, re-estimated on September 1st that about 25 million cubic meters of combined tainted waters and toxic slurry escaped from the Tailings Storage Facility on August 4th.



Author's photo, September 16, 2014. Upper reach of Hazeltine Creek, looking southeast down the contamination zone.

The Ministry of Environment has evidently failed to collect adequate/ numerous slurry sediment samples throughout the spectrum of the inundated zone alongside Hazeltine Creek. Though meagre, the results may be sufficient and should anticipate a necessary outcome for the Ministry to classify the entire zone a 'contaminated site' under the [BC Contaminated Site Regulations \(CSR\)](#). This would allow the Ministry of Environment to investigate all of the options under the law, including the immediate hiring of a qualified contamination site expert to conduct a thorough and methodological assessment report of the contamination hazard matrix, and to recommend remediation options.

About a week ago, Imperial Metals began conducting 18 transects of the 8 kilometre-long contaminated zone in the Hazeltine Creek area, at about 500 meter intervals. A source stated that the company collected a “substantial” number of tailings slurry sediment samples. The results of the un-publicized mining company sampling, along with critical information about the sampling methodology applied by the samplers, may be available in about 2 weeks, just before the arrival of the first snowfall.



The BC Tap Water Alliance Coordinator recently calculated from an Imperial Metals company aerial photo that about 125 hectares (1,250,000 square metres) of Crown forest lands were destroyed by the tailings slurry. In addition, a consultant who walked along the entire inundated zone stated on September 16th that in numerous areas on either side of the Hazeltine destruction zone up to 30 to 40 metres of standing forest floor lands were blanketed with tailing slurry sediments, making the area of impact far greater in area than 125 hectares. No official estimate of the total Crown forest land area destroyed and impacted has been released to the public.

“The Ministry of Environment’s sampling investigation of the environmental disaster within the Hazeltine Creek watershed has so far been woefully inadequate,” notes Alliance Coordinator Will Koop. “We believe that the government has been playing down and stalling on what it should have declared many weeks ago, namely that the Hazeltine watershed be declared a “contaminated site” under BC law. As such, the government should immediately order a forensic examination of the zone of contamination by a qualified expert. Another option the government should investigate is ordering Imperial Metals to construct a containment dyke along the perimeter of Quesnel Lake at Hazeltine Creek to collect and treat all affected water runoff and prevent further contamination of Quesnel Lake over time leached through and sourced from the watershed-strewn tailings slurry (see satellite image above). The rate of water runoff generated from groundwater and precipitation (rain and snow events) sources will dictate how this significant tragedy will continue to unfold, both before and after the oncoming winter season, despite a curious lack of toxic heavy metals concentration sampling data on the tailings inundation area around Hazeltine Creek. In addition to the containment berm, the contamination zone should be fenced off from human and animal entry (see satellite image above).”