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Press Release

Saskatchewan Environmental Society

Wednesday, February 12, 2014

For immediate release

Misfortune for Saskatchewan

The Saskatchewan Environmental Society (SES) is deeply concerned that the Government of Saskatchewan saw fit to approve the Fortune Minerals Metal Processing Plant near Langham yesterday, despite receiving more than 200 submissions of concern from residents of Langham, Dalmeny, the RM of Corman Park, and Saskatoon. "By approving the project, it is clear that minimal, short term, economic benefits have been allowed to trump public safety and protection of our drinking water resources," said Ann Coxworth, SES Board Member. "That is not acceptable."

Peter Prebble, SES Environmental Policy Director, said, "The Fortune Minerals Metal Processing Plant is not in the interests of nearby agricultural producers, is bad for quality of life, and is incompatible with future residential growth north of Saskatoon. Who will want to live near the 106-acre, arsenic-laced waste pit that Fortune Minerals plans to create and leave behind?"

Coxworth and Prebble pointed to a "cauldron" of unresolved public safety and environmental issues that, when taken together, justify rejection of the project. These include:

1. At least 2,800,000 tonnes of hazardous waste residue will be left behind on the Fortune Minerals site east of Langham forever.
2. The waste residue will contain 7% arsenic by weight. Over time some of that arsenic will migrate below the liners and the compacted till intended to contain it, and could thus reach the Dalmeny Aquifer. Moreover, during the years when the 14-foot deep waste pits are open to the elements, strong prairie winds could blow arsenic-laden dust out of the pits and onto neighboring farm land. Arsenic is hazardous in concentrations above 10 parts per billion.
3. Toxic sodium cyanide will be used to extract gold at the proposed plant. The use of sodium cyanide is banned in Wisconsin, Montana, and parts of Europe.
4. Many hazardous chemicals will be stored on the Fortune Minerals site, increasing the risks to workers, and posing risks to the public in the event of fires.
5. Special attention should be paid to the fire hazard associated with the solvent extraction process Fortune Minerals proposes to use for the recovery of copper.

6. The Fortune Minerals project will permanently lower the water level in the Dalmeny Aquifer and in nearby wells.
7. Fortune Minerals plans to inject large quantities of briny liquid waste deep underground into the Souris River formation. Because the proposed brine injection wells will penetrate through the Dalmeny Aquifer, any well failure resulting in leakage through the well casing creates a risk of contaminating the region's drinking water source.
8. Fortune Minerals has won approval for its project without having presented a plan for how the plant will be decommissioned or what the cost of decommissioning will be. This is a serious oversight that may leave the Province and municipality with future financial liabilities.

"The Fortune Minerals project will generate only 85 jobs for its 18-25 year operating life," said Coxworth. "Meanwhile, the waste residue left behind will be hazardous for thousands of years into the future. There is no benefit here for our children or future generations. This is simply not the kind of project a growing and thriving region like Saskatoon needs."

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