

Red Chris Mine waits for final permit

by [Katarina Sostaric, KSTK News](#)

May 29, 2015 10:00 am



Mining at Red Chris in February 2015. (imperialmetals.com)

A controversial British Columbia mine upriver from Wrangell and Petersburg is slated to ramp up to full production this summer. But the Red Chris Mine is still waiting for final approval from the B.C. government and a First Nations group.

The Red Chris copper and gold mine in the Stikine River watershed has been operating on a [temporary environmental permit since February](#).

It was recently extended through mid-June.

A B.C. official [told a Canadian newspaper](#) it gives government and [Tahltan First Nation environmental](#) teams more time to [evaluate the mine's tailings dams before issuing](#) the final permit.

The [tailings dam system for mine waste management](#) is facing a lot of criticism after a dam at the Mount Polley Mine in B.C. collapsed last summer. It spilled millions of gallons of waste into Canadian waterways.

Imperial Metals owns that mine and Red Chris.

Southeast Alaskans worry B.C. mines could destroy salmon and other wildlife that many people depend on for subsistence and income. Some want their concerns to be addressed in B.C.'s mine permitting process.

Wrangell is at the mouth of the Stikine River, and Aaron Angerman is a member of the Wrangell Cooperative Association. He is also that group's representative to the United Tribal Transboundary Mining Work Group.

Angerman said he is not comforted by government and indigenous groups' additional efforts to inspect the Red Chris mine and its tailings dams.

"For them to take any different route is almost a moot point because this place was built just like the Mount Polley Mine, larger in scale, and is already running, by the same designers that put this other one together," Angerman said. "It's a little too late for those on the Stikine, I guess."

Angerman said he is very concerned about the Red Chris mine because Wrangell residents depend on the Stikine for so many resources.

"People need to be aware that while there's a permitting process wrapping up, this has been open since February, and this has been functioning since then," Angerman said. "And the impacts it could have of basically a dam the size of 10,000 Olympic swimming pools, filled with toxic chemicals, giving way and washing down our river coming straight toward Wrangell, could be devastating."

Meanwhile, Imperial Metals is losing a lot of money and facing technical challenges as it attempts to bring Red Chris up to full production.

Imperial borrowed millions of dollars to keep the company going until it can make money at Red Chris. It is also trying to reopen Mount Polley.

Imperial Metals President Brian Kynoch told shareholders recently that Red Chris was well on its way to full production this spring. But it had to cut back because of technical issues.

“Since about the second half of April, due to slower spring runoff than forecast, the water levels in the tailings pond were insufficient to run the mill at targeted rates,” Kynoch said. “And this resulted in us running the mill intermittently until just a couple of days ago.”

He said he expects Red Chris to be operating at commercial production levels later this summer.