

Northwestern B.C. mine receives discharge permit

by [Josh Massey - Terrace Standard](#)

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AMID controversy surrounding the Mount Polley mine dam failure report released last Friday, mine owner Imperial Metals has been successful in receiving a permit to begin filling a tailings facility at its Red Chris gold and copper project northeast of Terrace.

“Red Chris has received an interim approval to operate the TSF (Tailings Storage Facility) in order to test the mill but not to go into production,” said a statement from the Ministry of Energy and Mines.

The permit is effective from February through May, after which Red Chris “will have to apply to the Chief Inspector [of Mines] for approval and will have to show that the TSF has performed as designed.”

Initial operations of the mine, which was scheduled to go into service last year, were on hold as the company financed a third party review of the tailings facility using a company chosen by the Tahltan Central Council which acts as the governing voice on Tahltan traditional territory.

[The review](#), released in October 2014, was part of a joint management agreement signed between the Tahltan Central Council and Imperial Metals in August 2014 following the Mount Polley disaster which spilled 25 million cubic metres of toxic tailings fluid into Quesnel Lake in the Cariboo area.

The independent review noted that glacial till and sand underneath the proposed Red Chris tailings facility was a concern and that the foundation soils were “a major design issue.”

“This valley is underlain by over 90m of permeable glacial fluvial sands and gravels with interlayers of at least one glacial till unit,” said the October 2014 report.

An investigation into the Mount Polley tailings facility failure released last week indicated that loose glacial till was a central reason for the breaking of that dam.

The mines ministry says it is satisfied with the actions taken by Imperial Metals at Red Chris to mitigate the danger noted in the third party review and has granted the company a temporary effluent discharge permit so it can begin testing the mine's mill which will process ore.

“Red Chris and their consultants have done extensive review of their subsurface hydrogeology and have made adjustments as per third party review recommendations,” said the ministry statement.

The tests being done between February and May are related to the mill which will crush up the rock in order to extract the copper and gold. The effectiveness of the tailings facility will also be monitored at this time, said the ministry.

The October 2014 Red Chris review also noted that a failure of the Red Chris tailing impoundment would be more severe than the Mount Polley spill because of the acid-generating nature of the rocks.

According to the Red Chris Tailings Impoundment Review Agreement negotiated in August, the Tahltan Central Council has to give consent to Red Chris before it can receive its effluent permit. This consent “will depend on the outcome of the review and the company's actions to implement and address the conclusions and recommendations of the review.”

Tahltan officials have yet to respond to the issuing of the temporary tailings permit.

The history of the Red Chris mine proposal has seen opposition at several points expressed by former Tahltan Central Council president Annita McPhee as well as the Tahltan activist group the Klabona Keepers. The proposed mine has also survived through dips and rebounds in the commodity prices over the last few years.

The major owner of Imperial Metals and its Red Chris mine is Murray Edwards who is also part owner of the Calgary Flames and has major stakes in the Alberta oil sands.

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