

Operations suspended at B.C.'s Mount Polley mine as copper prices decline

'A couple hundred' employees will be out of work, says mayor of nearby Williams Lake

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A tailings dam collapse at the Mount Polley mine in August 2014 sent waste down the Hazelton Creek into Quesnel Lake. (Jonathan Hayward/Canadian Press)

Imperial Metals says it's suspending all operations at B.C.'s Mount Polley mine because of declining copper prices.

Operations at the mine, located about 230 kilometres northwest of Kamloops, are expected to stop by the end of May, according to the Vancouver-based company.

A statement said "operations will resume once the economics of mining" at the mine improve.

- [Mount Polley engineers headed for disciplinary hearings](#)

In the meantime, hundreds of people are out of their jobs, according to Williams Lake Mayor Walter Cobb.

"We're talking not only a couple hundred employees at the mine, but we're talking all the support workers, all the rest of it that goes along with it," Cobb said Monday.

"But we've been through some hard times before and I guess we'll have to buckle up and do what we can do to alleviate the impact."

2014 spill

Mount Polley was the site of one of the biggest spills in B.C. history when a tailings dam collapsed in August 2014, sending 24 million cubic metres of mine waste and sludge into nearby waterways.

Two reports, by B.C.'s chief inspector of mines and an independent panel of engineering experts, found the collapse was caused by a poorly designed dam that didn't account for drainage and erosion failures.



A aerial view shows the damage caused by a tailings pond breach near the town of Likely, B.C. Tuesday, August, 5, 2014. (Jonathan Hayward/THE CANADIAN PRESS)

Full operations resumed in July 2017 with a repaired and reinforced tailings dam amid assurances by the provincial government that mining code revisions would ensure a similar disaster couldn't happen again.

Imperial Metals said the looming suspension of operations will have no impact on Mount Polley's ongoing environmental monitoring and remediation program.

'Provincewide impact'

In August, Imperial Metals said unionized workers at Mount Polley had voted in favour of a new three-year contract, after initiating strike action in May following a lockout by the company.

Bryan Cox, president of the Mining Association of B.C., said the mine is a significant employer in the Cariboo region and also creates indirect jobs including supplier positions across the province.

"There's really a provincewide impact when there's impact to our operations in B.C.," he said.

- **Province halts private prosecution against Mount Polley tailings spill**

There has been volatility in the copper market for some time and the price was near its lowest point in about 18 months, Cox said.

B.C. is the No. 1 copper producer in Canada, but it's a global industry and tax structures need to be as competitive as possible to protect local jobs, he said.

With files from Meera Bains and the Canadian Press

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