

# B.C. environmental group urges stop to Ajax Mine project over water-safety concerns



Boaters fish for trout on Jacko Lake, near the site a proposed Ajax copper mine, in the grasslands on the outskirts of Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada, November 16, 2016.

CHRIS HELGREN/REUTERS

**MIKE HAGER** >  
VANCOUVER  
AUGUST 14, 2017

An environmental group is asking the local bureaucrat in charge of Kamloops' drinking water to stop a controversial billion-dollar mining project that could soon be approved by the provincial government.

The University of Victoria's Environmental Law Centre mailed a letter to the local drinking-water officer Monday alleging previous environmental studies done on the Ajax Mine proposal, owned by the Polish firm KGHM, did not take into account how toxic chemicals from the open-pit copper and gold mine could contaminate surface water to leach into a nearby creek and two aquifers that provide drinking water to more than 100 residents. A Vancouver-based representative of the company was unavailable for comment on Friday.

The province is expected to issue its environmental assessment certificate as early as this fall, but this independent bureaucrat has the power to order the company to stop the project until it properly addresses the risks posed to the

## TRENDING

- 1 Family mourns six-year-old boy killed in dog attack in Riceton, Sask.
- 2 These are the favourite travel websites of Canadians
- 3 Harvard revokes fellowship for Chelsea Manning after backlash
- 4 CREA cuts 2017 home sales outlook; August resales rebound
- 5 Friday's analyst upgrades and downgrades 🔑

## LATEST VIDEOS

Video: 'End of mission': NASA's Cassini crashes into Saturn 🎬 1:09

NASA pays tribute to the Cassini probe's last mission 🎬 2:15

Red Cross says 22,000 Irma evacuees in shelters 🎬 1:12

NASA research subjects ending eight months of isolation 🎬 1:16

Eyewitnesses describe scene of London bomb attack 🎬 2:21

local water supply, according to Calvin Sandborn, the legal director of the UVic centre leading the campaign to stop the mine. If the officer does not issue an order, they can still ask B.C.'s environment ministry to ask the company to address inadequacies in its assessment of the contaminant risks identified in a new report from an independent hydrogeologist commissioned by the centre, he said.

"The final [provincial environmental] certificate is not issued, that could happen in the fall – that's why we're filing this thing," Mr. Sandborn said Friday. "Even with the certificate, the drinking-water protection order takes precedence because the Drinking Water Protection Act takes precedence over other legislation."

B.C.'s drinking-water officers were given this power after seven people died and more than 2,300 became sick in 2000 from tainted water in Walkerton, Ont., Mr. Sandborn said.

He said his organization has had success using this approach before when input from local drinking-water officers resulted in the B.C. environment industry ordering Okanagan dairy farmers to clean up pollution affecting the Hullcar Aquifer as well as contributed to a coal company pulling out from the Raven Mine proposal on Vancouver Island.

He added that local residents and groups such as his are trying to fill in gaps in the province's management of the mining industry, which the B.C.'s Auditor-General said last year was failing to protect the environment against significant risk because the government dedicated too few resources, conducted infrequent inspections and suffered from a lack of enforcement.

KGHM initially filed the Ajax Mine proposal in 2011. The project was the first in B.C. required to prepare a community-consultation plan as part of its proposal. KGHM owns 80 per cent of the project, while Vancouver-based Abacus Mining and Exploration owns the remaining 20 per cent. No one from KGHM was available to comment on the centre's letter Friday afternoon.

Last month, Kamloops City Council voted to send to a letter to senior levels of government explaining why the community is "an unequivocal no" on the project.

The proposed mine, which is also opposed by First Nations in the region, has been a divisive issue for the city. Supporters cited its potential to create hundreds of stable, high-paying jobs and millions of dollars worth of tax revenue for governments.

Opponents raised concerns about dust, noise and potential health effects. KGHM rejigged its original proposal in 2014 to address some of those issues.

But concerns remained, with critics saying potential risks from the project – which would be within two kilometres of residential areas – were still too great.

The council's position did not come as a surprise to KGHM, who would continue to pursue the project, a project manager told The Globe and Mail at the time.

In March, the Stk'emlupsemc Te Secwepemc Nation declared its opposition to the Ajax Mine following its own environmental review. SSN, which represents two First Nations communities, said the Ajax Mine project "is in opposition to the SSN land use objective for this profoundly sacred, culturally important and historically significant keystone site."

Should the mine go ahead, the City of Kamloops has agreed in principle to a community benefits agreement with KGHM Ajax Mining of \$3.8-million a year.

The project has an estimated cost of \$1.3-billion. KGHM says the mine would operate for 23 years and employ about 500 people, with about 1,800 jobs during an initial construction phase.

---

PLAY VIDEO  
2:01

Video: Trudeau takes helicopter tour of B.C. wildfire damage  
(THE CANADIAN PRESS)

---

FOLLOW MIKE HAGER ON TWITTER [@MIKEPHAGER](#)

---

[REPORT AN ERROR](#) [LICENSING OPTIONS](#)

---

 9 COMMENTS

---

**MORE ON THIS STORY**

Kamloops city council votes against controversial Ajax copper-gold mine

PIPELINES

B.C.'s NDP government to join legal challenges against Trans Mountain pipeline

Access to backcountry in B.C.'s Interior restricted in response to wildfire risks

---

**NEXT STORY**

Amber Alert continues for missing Quebec boy; mother found dead

