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## **Mercury issue raises new concerns about Northern Pulp's controversial new treatment facility**

Pictou, NS: Northern Pulp's controversial plan for a new effluent treatment facility (ETF) just got a lot more controversial, say Friends of the Northumberland Strait (FONS). The issue is mercury - and whether the construction of NPNS's proposed new ETF next to the former Canso Chemicals plant could disturb the mercury remaining at the site and lead to its spread in the environment, now or in the future.

The Canso Chemicals property is known to be contaminated with mercury. It contains "on-site secure landfills" built between 1992 and 1999. The landfills contain free mercury from contaminated soils as well as mercury-contaminated materials generated from demolition of the old Canso Chemicals buildings. Mercury is also known to have seeped into bedrock on the site.

"Mercury should be a big red flag," says Jill Graham-Scanlan, President of FONS. "But instead of a red flag, there is no flag, no mention at all of mercury at the adjacent Canso Chemicals site in the 1700 pages that Northern Pulp submitted to the EA."

Graham Scanlan says her group has many questions. Could construction of the new ETF disturb mercury in the bedrock? Could it impact the landfills built in the 1990s that presently contain the mercury? Could it lead to new releases of mercury into the environment, or speed-up existing releases? Has any mercury leached into the area where Northern Pulp plans to build?

Plans for Northern Pulp's new ETF show that the clarifiers and the activated sludge basins with depths of seven metres and greater would sit very close to the former Canso Chemicals site. Is it possible that mercury from the contaminated site could seep into the treatment system and end up in the sludge that will be burned, or in the effluent released into the Strait? What concerns us is that no one seems to have asked these questions, and there are no answers," Graham-Scanlan points out.

Northern Pulp's documents say only, "The former Canso Chemicals plant is located on the adjacent property south of the NPNS facility industrial site." And, "[s]imilar to the pipeline, there is limited potential for encountering contaminants; however, NPNS' contingency plan for encountering contaminated materials during construction will apply to the construction of the ETF [Effluent Treatment Facility] as well."

That's not much reassurance. Graham-Scanlan says that Northern Pulp has completely fluffed off mercury as a potential environmental risk. The company has provided no evidence for

their claim that there is limited potential for encountering contaminants, especially mercury, when there is known mercury contamination close by. They provide no evidence that the project will not increase risks of release of mercury into the environment.

“When there is potential of mercury contamination, you don’t brush it off or hide it - it requires serious and thorough investigation - and that has not happened,” says Graham-Scanlan. “We believe the Minister of Environment cannot approve this project until the issue is thoroughly investigated, with time for public examination of all information, no matter how long that takes.”

Mercury is an environmental toxin which is persistent and bio-accumulative. It does not “go away” and can build up in the environment and in the food chain. There is no known safe level of human exposure to mercury.

Graham-Scanlan says that in the thousands of pages of FOIPOP documents she reviewed, she saw no discussion of this topic. “We know that Nova Scotia Environment (NSE) is aware of mercury contamination on the Canso Chemicals site. NSE has required monitoring and reporting on the contamination for the last 20 years.

It’s not only NSE that knows about the issue. Dillon, the consultant hired by Northern Pulp to conduct the EA for the new treatment facility, is the same company that wrote the *Canso Chemicals Site Decommissioning Final Report* in January, 2000. Dillon is well aware of the mercury contamination next door.

There are also links between Northern Pulp and Canso Chemicals. Choong Wei Tan is a director of both Northern Pulp Nova Scotia Corporation and Canso Chemicals Ltd. Tom Dewtie, Northern Pulp’s supply chain manager, is also a director of Canso Chemicals.

Graham-Scanlan says her group became aware of the issue on Tuesday, when journalist Joan Baxter published an [investigative article in the Halifax Examiner](#).

“This issue could so easily have been missed, with 1700 pages of information to examine in 30 days,” said Graham Scanlan. “It underscores our concerns about this whole fast-tracked Class 1 environmental assessment. What else could be missed in this process?”

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**Additional background information:**

Joan Baxter, Halifax Examiner March 5, 2019, [Northern Pulp’s Environmental Documents: Missing Mercury, A Pulp Mill that Never Was, and Oodles of Contradictions](#)