



Date: 2019-11-10  
File / dossier : 6.02.04  
Edocs pdf : 6038727

**Written submission from the  
Prince Albert Grand Council**

**Mémoire du  
Grand conseil de Prince Albert**

**Regulatory Oversight Report for  
Uranium Mines and Mills in  
Canada: 2018**

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**Rapport de surveillance  
réglementaire pour les mines et  
usines de concentration d'uranium  
au Canada : 2018**

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Commission Meeting

Réunion de la Commission

December 12, 2019

Le 12 décembre 2019

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**PRINCE ALBERT GRAND COUNCIL**  
**Prince Albert, Saskatchewan**

**A Written Submission Report to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission**  
**November 5, 2019**

**A Review of the Regulatory Oversight Report on Uranium Mines and Mills (2018)**

**Prince Albert Executive:**

Grand Chief Brian Hardlotte

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Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC) was awarded participatory funding from the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC). The following are activities that are undertaken by PAGC in fulfillment of the contribution agreement:

- 1) Review of the Regulatory Oversight Report (ROR) on Uranium Mines and Mills: 2018;
- 2) Written Report Submission to the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission on the ROR;
- 3) Attendance at the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission Hearing/Meeting;
- 4) Report to the Prince Albert Grand Council Executive and 12 First Nations;

**INTRODUCTION:**

The aim of the PAGC proposal submitted is to enhance northern Saskatchewan First Nations participation and perspectives in CNSC activities and in particular a review of the 2018

Regulatory Oversight Report on Uranium Mines and Mills which is focused on safety and performance measures.

PAGC communities are directly and indirectly impacted by the Uranium mining industry. The majority of the operating mines, decommissioned, and remediation sites that are in the report are located adjacent to northern Saskatchewan Athabasca communities. The industry also employs workers from the 28 reserve communities under the umbrella of the 12 First Nations from Treaties 5, 6, 8, 10.

Education, awareness, regular reports, and attendance in commission hearings are key to understanding the role, mandate, and activities of CNSC. The updates on operating mines/mills and the status of decommissioned and remediation sites are linked to the current and future health of the land, lakes, and rivers as well as First Nations peoples who live close to these sites.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous intervenor presentations in hearings that are focused in other regions across Canada help to provide comprehensive insight into the uranium mining industry. The engagement and participation of Prince Albert Grand Council member communities is critical and paramount in the on-going work of CNSC.

The mandate of PAGC is the protection of Treaty Rights of the 12 First Nations under the umbrella of the organization. PAGC has a responsibility to ensure 'Free, Prior, and Informed Consent' is upheld by governments and industry when it comes to approving projects and mining licenses. Furthermore, PAGC is committed to working with all sectors in Canada on the fulfillment of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

First Nations peoples in PAGC communities have lived in northern Saskatchewan for thousands of years. Like other Indigenous peoples worldwide, they share a strong stewardship relationship with the land and have accumulated knowledge and wisdom that can be used as value added information in CNSC activities, processes, and decision-making bodies.

PAGC is willing to work with CNSC staff to establish and build a strong relationship that is beneficial for First Nations, the industry, and Canadian society in general. The meaningful inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the overall work of CNSC is critical in the spirit of reconciliation.

### **PAGC REVIEW OF THE REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS TO CNSC**

The Regulatory Oversight Report has followed some of the recommendations since the last commission hearings in 2018. It provides a good understanding in terms of where each mine is located and a short history of when it started operations and who owns it. The following are major issues that have been identified in the Regulatory Oversight Report based on the review.

## **REPORT CONTENT AND READER FRIENDLY ISSUES**

The report was reviewed by PAGC with the assistance of a Scientist and a First Nations consultant both with PhD Qualifications. The contents of future reports must continue to be written so they are reader friendly and comprehensible to the general public. While there is a need for formal objective scientific terminology, this can be balanced with toning down the language and providing clear statements that can be understood by the average person.

First Nations in the PAGC region are interested in learning more about CNSC as well as a deeper level understanding of the uranium mining industry, how it is structured, how it is connected to governments, health & safety standards, quality assurance, and environmental protection measures.

The way in which the reports are written are key to clarity, understanding, and meaningful participation. First Nations are sometimes left on their own to summarize and make interpretations of the report in the language that is spoken in communities. There is a lot of work involved in translations into Indigenous languages. It is recommended that Dissemination Funds be provided for First Nations Language translations. In 2019, Canada passed the Indigenous Languages Act which must be implemented and enforced in all sectors including the mining industry.

The report is on safety and performance and so it should make links to the long-term health and well-being of First Nations people who work in the uranium mining industry. It is strongly recommended that health monitoring be done by an independent body such as a university that has access to health funding.

The Indigenous Health Research Centre in Saskatchewan is an entity that can assist with long-term human health monitoring projects. From a First Nations perspective, health and well-being is about mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical development. How does the mining industry contribute toward creating a healthy workforce based on these four dimensions?

## **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN CNSC STAFF AND FIRST NATION COMMUNITIES**

PAGC communities thrive on reciprocal communication as the key to building a strong relationship with governments and industry. Face-to-face dialogue between CNSC staff and local level community members is recommended. The people need to see who they are communicating with. Although websites and the use of technology are important, connectivity is often an issue in northern communities especially in isolated regions. Elderly First Nation members are often technologically challenged. Oral traditions have been upheld by Supreme Court rulings and need to be respected.

PAGC is willing to work with CNSC staff in strengthening communication efforts with northern First Nations communities. Cultural protocols in relation to respectful communication processes can be co-developed. It is recommended that collaborative planning of community forums, local dialogue sessions, land-based gatherings, ceremonial feasts, formal consultations, and

strategies to engage key local stakeholders be included in funding arrangements. Move away from meetings held in faraway places from home that are alien, intimidating, and expensive.

### **PARTICIPANT FUNDING LEVELS NEED TO BE INCREASED**

PAGC recommends Participant Funding be substantially increased for the meaningful participation of PAGC members in the thematic call out for proposals regarding other areas of interest in the future.

There are geographical challenges where PAGC communities are located in northern Saskatchewan. There are gravel roads, long distances between locations, harsh weather condition, and places only accessible by air.

PAGC leaders are the first to receive call out for proposals and reports. These are then shared in council meetings that are scheduled depending on annual funding that impacts frequency. Reports then need to be shared with local community members for input which then go back to leadership tables and eventually back to government and industry.

It is recommended that CNSC staff take into consideration local level communication processes when providing funding and assessing proposals for participation in CNSC activities. Bringing together the 12 PAGC leaders into the city of Prince Albert for one day exceeds \$25,000.

It is not uncommon for First Nations to hire consultants, scientists, and other experts to assist with participation and reviews of reports especially where CNSC activities are linked to non-compliance violations and/or potential violations of treaties.

### **TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE & MINING INDUSTRY**

PAGC, CNSC, the Uranium industry, and governments all value the importance of the Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of Indigenous peoples. Not only is the knowledge important, but also the Indigenous processes of engagement that need to be taken into consideration. There are Elders, traditional land users, diverse knowledge keepers, and women who are able to provide specialized input into CNSC activities.

It is recommended that CNSC work closely with PAGC in ensuring TEK plays a pivotal role in planning, administration, management, environmental assessments, mining inspections, remediation, and reclamation efforts. It is not enough to invite Elders to meetings and hearings as a form of tokenism without formal processes, protocols of engagement, and proper compensation for their collective intellectual property rights.

In the 2018 commission hearing, the reviewers noted that CNSC and Mining officials had a hard time answering the role of TEK in the uranium mining industry as a whole. No examples could be provided. PAGC can assist and collaborate with CNSC and the uranium mining industry in the on-going inclusion of TEK in all areas and levels where it is required.

PAGC is willing to provide culturally competency training for CNSC and Uranium mining policy makers, administration, management, and supervisors that is tailored made for the northern Saskatchewan context. The bridging of knowledge perspectives between TEK and Western Science requires cross-cultural knowledge exchange and mutual understanding translated into actual practices.

A good example is the utilization of Indigenous-based restorative processes for conflict resolution. These processes are also beneficial for non-Indigenous workers. First Nations philosophies and traditional cultural practices around creating a healthy workforce is important as they are linked to safety and performance. These can be introduced prior to entry into the mining sites as well as on-going workshops for both employers and employees.

### **INDEPENDENT MONITORING QUALITY ASSURANCE**

First Nations in the PAGC region want to reassurance that their lands, lakes, rivers, animals, plants, medicines, and traditional food sources remain healthy during operations and after the closure of mines and mills. While there are several layers of quality assurance measures being taken with strict performance criteria of licensees, it is imperative that independent monitoring be strengthened to include more than one contracted organization for comparative purposes.

The 2018 report lists several regulatory and guidance documents that have yet to be implemented. Prince Albert Grand Council questions why these documents were not articulated and implemented before. However, there is reassurance they will be part of the on-going compliance work of CNSC and the uranium mining industry.

PAGC recommends First Nations youth involvement in long-term land, lakes, and river monitoring projects of sites as well as in remediation and reclamation efforts. These activities can be part of recruiting them into Pure and Applied Science Careers where they are currently under-represented. Indigenous Guardianship programs are gaining importance. They are a good way to introduce them to mining and environmental careers. PAGC can be instrumental in assisting CNSC in developing programs that combine Scientific and TEK knowledge and skill sets.

### **URANIUM MINING SPILL AND LEAKAGES**

There are spills and leakages in the 2018 report. These incidents need more detail. Industry has a major responsibility for accountability and transparency in reporting procedures. Are these small, medium, large spills? The public has no knowledge. Trending information is critical and what the licensee is doing in terms of clean up and whether or not there is environmental and health risks involved.

KEYLAKE MINE. In December 2018 Cameco reported an increase in uranium concentrations in groundwater well MT-802, after a review of the groundwater data. The elevated concentrations date back to June 2018.

MCLEAN LAKE MINE. On July 26, 2018, a hydrovac truck was removing water from the north SABRE clarification pond. The operator noticed that mine water was leaking onto the ground from the rear door seal.

MCLEAN LAKE MINE. On December 22, 2018 an Orano employee discovered an anhydrous ammonia drip coming from an offload valve that was not fully closed. It is estimated that approximately 60 litres was released.

PAGC recommends that independent monitoring organizations be involved in assessing these spills for comparative purposes. It is not enough to report the incidents occurred and that industry took compliance measures. It is not enough to state that compliance was 'satisfactory'. Industry non-compliance, including spills and leakages whether they are small or large need to be dealt with using open communication. Compliance ratings that are used in the report are broad and need to be more specific.

### **INDEPENDENT MONITORING OF HUMAN HEALTH**

First Nations in the PAGC region including the general public want reassurance that all Uranium mining employees are healthy in the long-term. It is imperative there be independent monitoring of human health risks as there may be cumulative effects of radioactive and radon exposure. The reviewers learned in past panel hearings, there is higher risk of exposure to radiation when there is high level graded ore. Commission panel members questioned the regulatory standards of measurement regarding exposure limits. The public needs to see clarity in terms of how these standards are set.

Information on Independent monitoring of human health especially among employees is needed in future reports. Tracking strategies are crucial for exiting employees. Recent mining closures have resulted in a large exodus of First Nations employees from uranium mine and mill sites. Once they leave, there is no information on the health effects of long-term exposure to uranium industry sites.

### **EMPLOYMENT IN DECOMMISSIONED AND REMEDIATION SITES**

PAGC strongly recommends priority be given to hiring northern First Nations in decommissioned and remediation sites. First Nations people have a strong relationship with the land and know what is required to maintain a healthy environment based on long-term stewardship practices. Uranium mining and mill sites are located within their traditional territories. They know the state of the land prior to mining operations. They have knowledge of what is needed to reinstate healthy landscapes. PAGC can assist CNSC and the mining industry in coordinating meaningful strategies to ensure proper First Nations input is provided in remediation and land reclamation clean-up activities.



## CONCLUSION

First Nations Elders are always concerned about the impacts of the Uranium mining industry on the health of the lands, lakes, and rivers as well as families who are already in vulnerable state as a result of decades of colonization and resource extraction activities by outside companies and governments. The protection of First Nations way of life is paramount. First Nations people consider themselves as part of the land. When the land is destroyed, they are profoundly affected at multiple levels which is not clearly understood within CNSC and the uranium mining industry. We state that their (First Nation members) belief systems with the lands are destroyed as the lands and related ecosystems are acting like unknown to them believing that the environment they live, wild meats/foods they harvest, medicines that gather, fish they eat, waters they drink, and airs they inhale are not safe to the community members. All these affect their mental and physical health from the time the mining operations in Athabasca region commenced.

During the 2018 commission hearing, the disappearing caribou herds were discussed. A leading Cameco representative indicated there are no impacts of the uranium mining industry on the Woodland caribou and that they were healthy. There was no mention these Caribou are officially under the Species at Risk Act. There were no mention the provincial range plans have not been completed by the province of Saskatchewan yet.

There is scientific evidence that suggests mining and exploration activities pose significant disturbances to animal and their habitats. PAGC has and continues to be strongly involved in the Caribou issue not only in relation to Woodland Caribou but also to growing concerns of the depletion of Barren Land Caribou herds that migrate down from Nunavut into northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba within a region where there is a heavy concentration of uranium and metal mining.

First Nations people have been in the region for decades. They will be in the same place long after the mines close down. They will be left with the mess created by industry. They will also be left with cleaning up the land. PAGC recommends that revenue resource sharing be seriously considered during environmental assessments and prior to awarding licenses to the mining industry. Reconciliation Calls to Action were adopted by the Canadian government. It is time the Uranium Mining industry provide concrete examples of fulfilling these recommendations in future reports.