

A Third Brazilian Mine Tailings Dam Disaster Is About to Occur. The Dangers of Experimental Copper Mining in Minnesota

(and the Story Elicits Silence from Northeast Minnesota's Media Outlets)

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I plead with the readers of this column to click on the following links and read about the Vale Mining Corporation's warning of an impending dissolution of yet another Brazilian mine tailings dam. [Here is the link to the developing story.](#)

The most important part of the report is the accompanying video which should be required viewing for every Minnesotan, every politician and every lover of drinkable water, the St Louis River, Lake Superior, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and Canada's Quetico Provincial Park.

In the 3½ minute video, BBC journalist David Shukman does a powerful job of telling the story about the inherent dangers of tailings lagoon dams (whether old or new) and their often-unpredictable dissolutions and massive release of poisonous chemicals into the watershed and river communities downstream.

Watch the terrifying video of the actual collapse of the 2019 disaster below.

Every Minnesotan who even vaguely recognizes the names "PolyMet" or "Twin Metals" or "Glencore" or Antofagasta" needs to watch this video; and every wannabe investigative journalist, whether professional or amateur, needs to study it. Reporters who went into the news business for idealistic reasons need to examine their hearts and question their editors about their proper desire to thoroughly cover important stories such as this one.

The sobering BBC video should compel every clear-headed citizen to forward the link to his or her congresspersons, mayors and city council representatives and demand that the potentially catastrophic PolyMet and Twin Metals projects be re-considered and disallowed.

As opposed to the humane, forward-looking politics of the Green Party, the Democratic Socialist Party and the Green New Deal faction of the Democratic Party, both of Minnesota's major political parties – Republican and DFL (and their past-appointed partisan bureaucrats in the regulatory agencies) have been embarrassingly subservient to the machinations of foreign mining and pipeline corporations by allowing them to essentially dictate how Minnesota's natural resources are to be exploited and endangered.

In the last few election cycles experimental copper-nickel sulfide mining in water-rich Minnesota was not made into a campaign issue by either of the two parties, so neither the major party losers nor the winners were ever forced to understand that the vast majority of

concerned citizens of northeast Minnesota do not want copper mining done anywhere near their endangered, still relatively unpolluted, fishable fresh water.

At this point in Minnesota's experimental copper/sulfide mining history, there are only four copper mining companies involved that we know of. Two of them are minor Penny Stock companies from Canada: PolyMet and Twin Metals. Both Penny Stock companies are essentially front groups whose business plans and stock holdings are controlled by two major foreign corporations.

PolyMet's parent company is Switzerland's Glencore and 100% of Twin Metals' stock is held by Chile's Antofagasta corporation.

If these inanimate corporations were sentient human beings, they would meet the definition of a sociopathic personality disordered entities - which makes them essentially conscienceless, pathological liars that usually only respond to legal threats, economic threats and the threat of punishment - not what is best for society or the long-term sustainability of the environment.

That means that - no matter what sociopathic corporations promise to do- they cannot really be trusted to fulfill those promises. Therefore, any professed concern about the environmental health of our water-rich region should be doubted. Wealthy sociopaths are able to afford cunning legal teams that enable them to get away with criminal misdeed after criminal misdeed. Just look at what Vale has gotten away with in Brazil, and just look at what Donald Trump's administration is trying to get away with up north as he revoked an Obama order to prevent Twin Metals/Antofagasta from proceeding with mine development upstream from the BWCAW.

The Censored-out Stories of Mine Catastrophes Around the World

To understand the real threats the experimental copper mining presents to Minnesota, one only has to recall

- 1) the catastrophic 2014 Mount Polley mine earthen dam collapse in British Columbia,
- 2) last two equally catastrophic Brazilian tailings dam collapses in 2015 and 2019 and now
- 3) the impending collapse of a third Brazilian mine dam that involves a long- abandoned and un-monitored dam site that is should be the moral responsibility of the Vale Mining corporation, the largest mining company in Brazil and the fifth largest in the world. Despite its size and supposed expertise, Vale admits that it has no idea how to avert the impending collapse.



What's left behind of a once-thriving Brazilian river town that was downstream from a collapsed mine tailings lagoon. Many of the now-dead and/or homeless occupants worked at the mine.

It needs to be pointed out that the engineer that designed the Vale dam burst in January 2019 also designed the proposed PolyMet tailings dam that the company says will eventually rise to an ultimate height of 250 feet; that is, if the project is allowed to go forward against the will of the people of Minnesota.

Clear-headed people who know the facts about copper mining in water-rich areas are justifiably concerned about the future of the St Louis River estuary, Lake Superior and the health of future generations.

(It needs to be pointed out that over 300 victims of the 2019 dam wall collapse drowned in the semi-solid sludge that had built up for decades in the tailings lagoon and that many of the bodies of the "missing" ones have been un-recoverably entombed forever, in the gradually drying sludge that hardens to the consistency of a brick. Some of that sludge has come to rest in layers that are many meters thick.)



The mouth of Brazil's mine waste-contaminated Rio Doce as it empties into the enlarging dead zone in the Atlantic Ocean 300 miles downstream from the 2015 tailings dam collapse (This could be the St. Louis River as it empties into Lake Superior)

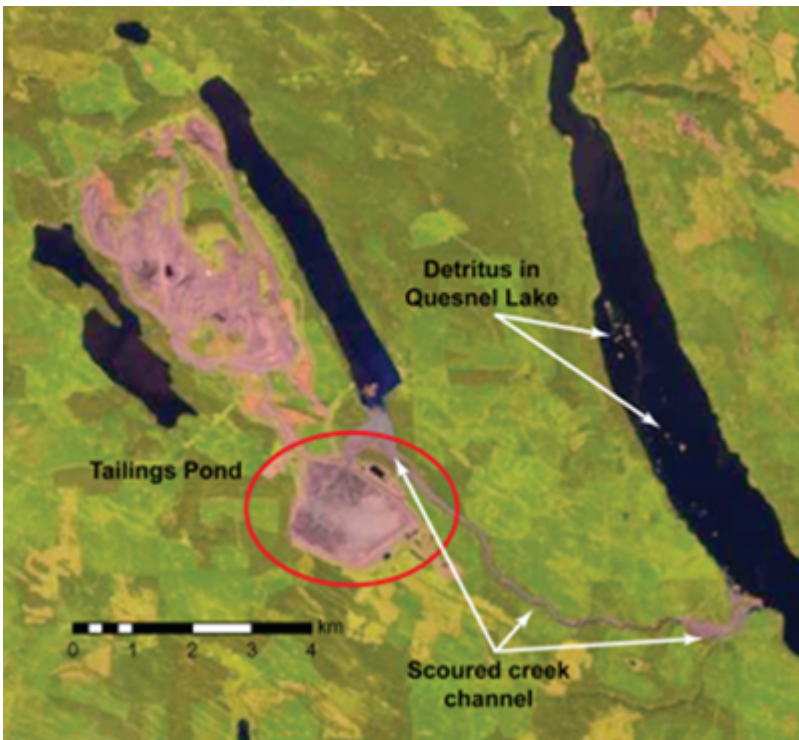
Last year the PolyMet project (including the weak plans for the mine tailings earthen dam walls) was approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA) and the US Forest Service. To observers it appeared that neither the DNR n the or PCA cared about the testimony from knowledgeable citizens. The thinking was that the PolyMet proposal had actually been pre-approved well prior to what were just “cosmetic” citizen hearings.

And then, adding insult to injury, just last week a three-judge panel of the Minnesota Court of Appeals affirmed PolyMet's amended, already dangerous plan to vastly increase the volume of daily sulfide ore production. The panel allowed PolyMet/Glencore to proceed with their development of the mine project without requiring a new Environmental Impact Statement to be presented to the DNR and PCA, even though the inherently dangerous earthen dam would likely have to be taller than the originally proposed 250 Feet in height!

The ruling, according to my reading of the court document, failed to pay much attention to the vitally important issue of the long-term storage requirements of the sulfuric acid-producing mine tailings.

I strongly suspect that the three judges are understandably unfamiliar with the many major and minor mine catastrophes that regularly occur all around the world. Such information has been carefully censored-out of the public's consciousness by the commercial news outlets that have corporate connections, and so even highly intelligent judges can easily become unfamiliar with important issues such as sulfide mining.

Some Visuals Concerning the Mount Polley Mine Disaster of 2014



Before and after satellite images of the Mount Polley, BC tailings dam disaster

Anatomy of a mine disaster

When the dam holding toxic tailings from the Mount Polley copper-gold mine broke near the central B.C. community of Likely, the deluge of debris quickly reshaped the landscape.



Why tailings ponds “designed” to hold back toxic sludge for an eternity are a set-up for disaster

If and when another tailings dam bursts in Brazil, the nearest downstream community will be drowned and disappeared under tens of millions of cubic meters of toxic sludge similar to what happened to the other two downstream communities that were victims of Vale’s unavoidably dangerous mine waste dams.

Twin Metals/Antofagasta intends to deliver its processed, liquified sulfuric-acid-producing waste products (which represent 99.5% of the total volume of the ore that is mined) to PolyMet/Glencore’s tailings lagoon. The eternally toxic contents of that lagoon, if it ever dissolves and drains downstream, will surely destroy the St. Louis River estuary as well as Lake Superior.

If the Twin Metals/Antofagasta rumored plan to not establish an on-site tailings lagoon is approved by the DNR and the PCA, that mine’s waste won’t directly risk the BWCAW. However, there will be other water contamination issues that are generated from both the mine and the processing plant.

That probability may explain why Canada, which aggressively controls the contiguous Quetico Provincial Park’s pristine, water-rich wilderness, is not officially making any noises objecting to the Twin Metals/Antofagasta project.

The Role of the Media in Public Unawareness of Issues Involving Big Business

PolyMet, Twin Metals and the mining industry in general don’t want – nor will they likely get – ANY serious journalistic coverage from any commercial northern Minnesota newspaper, including the Duluth News-Tribune. Most media outlets constrain themselves when they are invited to criticize sociopathic Big Businesses that could offer advertising revenue in the future. Advertising money from any given well-off corporation can affect next quarter’s profit or loss margins and can understandably trump ethics.

And we can’t expect to see any serious journalism from any of northern Minnesota’s

television stations either. TV stations have even more significant conflicts of interest with the mining industry that could benefit from conscienceless resource exploitation.

Ever since 1) Mount Polley British Columbia's 2014 catastrophe (the disaster that permanently polluted Quesnel Lake - a world-famous salmon fishery) and ever since 2) the Brazilian mining catastrophes that occurred in 2015 and 2019, there has been a lot of investigative journalism done that pointed out the fact that similar disasters are likely to happen sometime in the future with any experimental sulfide mining that is done in northeast Minnesota.

Some Comments About the So-called "Free Press" in the Corporation-saturated United States

However, none of that investigative journalism about the serious threats that experimental copper mining poses to Minnesota has been done by the Duluth News-Tribune, the several television stations that serve the area, the many radio stations in the area or in more than a few of the many smaller newspapers that should really be concerned about the health and sustainability of the region's environment.

The Duluth Reader is only one of three newspapers in the region that has done any significant journalism exposing this vitally important issue. The other two papers are the Timberjay (a commercial newspaper out of Ely and Tower) and Duluth's other alternative newspaper, the Zenith News. One has to ask "why".

The Duluth Reader is the largest of the two free, Duluth-area alternative newsweekly magazines.

Neither of those papers takes any advertising money from the mining industry (nor do they take any money from most other major corporation, as far as I can tell). That freedom from corporate conflicts of interest gives the Reader and the Zenith the freedom to do honest journalism and freely publish unwelcome truths about issues that would expose and thus offend corporations - whether criminally-minded or not - that frequently advertise in "normal" commercial media outlets.

Most corporations are on the lookout for vulnerable politicians and political parties that might be willing to accept campaign "contributions" (with the implication being: "if you want more money to fund future campaigns, adhere to our particular corporate agenda"). Giving money to politicians is just another common device that wealthy elites, their foundations and their other special interest groups use to ensure that their business "investment goals" will more likely be achieved.

At any rate, the future of water-rich northeast Minnesota is again being manipulated by foreign entities that cannot be expected (due to their sociopathic tendencies) to pay much attention to the logical objections that are coming from every citizen who really understands the huge risks that copper-nickel/sulfide mining poses to our region.

Ignoring the will of the people and the future of our habitat is a serious mistake of the powers that be. That is because when all the legal, non-violent means of exposing and opposing a sociopathic corporate project's deep flaws have been exhausted, certain segments of the opposition will be tempted to resort to what they consider justifiable violence to prevent what they regard as a crime both against nature and humanity.



One only has to recall what happened last year when another cabal of transnational corporate powers tried to push through their private oil company pipeline against the will of the people by using anti-democratic, “eminent domain”, pro-corporate, “fascism-lite” tactics in the Dakota Access Pipeline confrontation at Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota.

Justice-seeking groups that were opposing the police state action began with non-violent tactics. But, when they were eventually put down with violent methods by armed, corporate mercenaries that worked hand-in-hand with North Dakota’s taxpayer-paid policemen and National Guard members. (Note that none of the cowardly corporate executives that were planning of profiting from the police state action showed up.)

And who won the day at Standing Rock - at least temporarily? It was the wealthy ruling elites that make use of police state tactics (rather than the voting booth) to get what they and what makes their Wall Street investors happy. It was those with enough wealth to “own” as many politicians as they can. It was the secretive, corporate sociopaths in three-piece suits that fly in their corporate jets.

But in the case of the high risks of potential mining catastrophes similar to the ones in British Columbia, Brazil and elsewhere around the world, the courageous water defenders and lovers of the environment are these days much more diverse and in some ways more powerful than those that stood their ground at Standing Rock.

Anybody would be foolish to think that violent confrontations won’t occur between the knowledgeable, justice-seeking, anti-copper mine majority and the political, business, Chamber of Commerce and media types that have been either openly in favor of, quietly working behind the scenes for or employing active censorship to prevent information from being published in the regional media that would inform average folks about the high risks of allowing experimental copper mining in water-rich northeast Minnesota.

A lot of protestors who are suffering the humiliation of not being listened to by the powers-that-be are keeping track of those entities that will be fingered for blame (and also

punishment) if and when a Brazilian-type disaster hits.

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*Since his retirement from his holistic mental health practice, **Dr Kohls** has been writing the weekly Duty to Warn column for the Duluth Reader, Minnesota's premier alternative newsweekly magazine. His columns, which have been re-published all around the world for the last decade, deal with a variety of justice issues, including the dangers of copper/nickel sulfide mining in water-rich northeast Minnesota and the realities of pro-corporate "Friendly" Fascism in America, militarism, racism, malnutrition, Big Pharma's over-drugging, Big Vaccine's over-vaccinating, Big Medicine's over-screening and over-treating agendas, as well as other movements that threaten human health, the environment, democracy, civility and the sustainability of the planet and the populace. Many of his columns have been archived at a number of websites, including the following four:*

[http://duluthreader.com/search?search_term=Duty+to+Warn&p=2;](http://duluthreader.com/search?search_term=Duty+to+Warn&p=2)

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/author/gary-g-kohls;>

[http://freepress.org/geographic-scope/national;](http://freepress.org/geographic-scope/national) and

<https://www.transcend.org/tms/search/?q=gary+kohls+articles>

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