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Cleanup starts at abandoned exploration sites



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ROLES program continues to identify new sites

The industry-led Restoration of Labrador Exploration Sites (ROLES) program has begun the physical work of pulling oil drums and other waste from remote, abandoned mineral exploration sites.



The Restoration of Labrador Exploration Sites (ROLES) program has used available records and interviews with Labrador community members to identify 153 potential sites requiring remediation after mining exploration activities in northern Labrador. To date, 114 sites have been inspected, including this one, where old oil drums await removal. — Submitted photo courtesy of Altius Resources

The former industrial camps and waste are not the responsibility of mining companies currently operating in Labrador. They are instead considered “legacy sites,” created by now-dead corporations, before regulations required securities be posted for remediation, in case a company fails to clean up after a drilling or trenching program.

While researching more than a year and continuing to identify new sites, the ROLES program is getting into cleanup, using helicopter flights to fly out waste.

“We identified 11 sites that had leaking drums or drums that were not in good shape, so there was the potential they might leak in the near future. So we decided to prioritize those sites and get those drums off the land, and so that’s what we’re doing right now,” said Emma Sharkey, manager of environmental affairs and community relations with Altius Resources.

Altius Resources helped launch ROLES, with a collection of partners from the mining sector. The company contributed \$50,000 to cleanup this year.

Work by individuals on the ROLES team has, to now, focused on the identification and evaluation of former exploration sites. As of December 2013, as The Telegram reported, 32 sites were identified while, to date, 153 sites have been marked.

The cleanup activities for the priority sites will take about two weeks to complete and are in progress, contracted to Aivek, out of Nain.

These sites are scattered but, generally speaking, in northern Labrador and west of Nain and Voisey's Bay. The other sites have been mapped in northern Labrador, around the central mineral belt and in western Labrador.

Total cost for the physical cleanup this year are hard to peg, Sharkey said, given ROLES benefits from in-kind supporters.

"I would say one of the major cost-saving elements for us is that Voisey's Bay, Vale, has actually offered to take on all of the barrels that we're getting off the land and they'll take over, once we bring them to their facility," she said. "So they'll process them using their waste management procedures and take on all of that cost themselves, so that's a huge help.

As The Telegram has previously reported, the most significant cost for the program is helicopter time, given the remote nature of the sites. The Nunatsiavut Government has donated helicopter and staff time as part of its support.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has contributed \$50,000 to the industry initiative this year. In addition, government staff assisted in identifying and evaluating sites.

"I think if you spoke to anybody who's really involved with the project, a lot of them have been working in this industry for sometimes decades, and they don't feel good about the way things have been done in the past," Sharkey said. "And they're really thrilled to be participating in something to help remedy all of that."

She said the hope is to continue the cleanup work next year, but progress will depend on contributions.

BY THE NUMBERS

The Restoration Of Labrador Exploration Sites (ROLES) program

- 153 potential abandoned exploration sites identified
- 114 sites inspected to date, with on-site waste documented
- 11 sites identified as cleanup priorities, being dealt with in 2014

Source: Emma Sharkey, Altius Minerals, working ROLES program, Sept. 25, 2014.

See related slideshow: <http://tinyurl.com/m64ma2o>

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