

# Department of Health and Human Services

## POPULATION HEALTH

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### Update on the monitoring of metals in Royal George

Dear Resident,

Over the last few months, officers have visited Royal George regularly to collect samples. I am writing to update you on the results of those environmental samples and to thank you for your co-operation.

#### River water

As you know, the St Paul's River water contained high levels of metals after heavy rain in 2010. The metals are being carried into the river in runoff from the mine tailings. Mineral Resources Tasmania has committed funds from its *Rehabilitation of Abandoned Mining Lands Trust Fund*. They started remediation work to address this runoff in mid-December 2010. An update on the works is included in this letter.

Following completion of the remediation work, the EPA will monitor the river water for metals during dry and wet periods. **The river water remains unsafe to drink. You should continue to use the water from the communal tank or boiled rainwater for all your drinking and cooking purposes.**

As I mentioned in my previous letter, it is safe for you or your children to use the river water for showering or bathing. However, remember to cover up any cuts with band-aids or bandages and watch children when bathing to make sure they don't drink the water.

#### Remediation works

Rock barriers were constructed in erosion gullies on the tailings during December. Barriers are designed to catch coarse sediments and reduce the sediment load and associated metals entering St Paul's River.

The next round of remediation works is planned for early autumn 2011 and will involve:

- Spreading lime onto tailings to aid in binding metals and promote revegetation.
- Establishing revegetation plots. The main aims of revegetation are to stabilise the tailings, suppress dust and reduce runoff.
- Limiting vehicle access onto the tailings to allow vegetation to establish and reduce dust.
- Stabilising existing runoff channels with rock armouring. This should also help to reduce sediment load entering the river.

A plan showing the nature and extent of planned work will be delivered to residents for comment in early February.

## Rainwater tanks

Four rainwater tanks have been monitored. These particular rainwater tanks were monitored as they are filled with water from roofs only, and do not contain river water. The intent of the monitoring was to determine if any dust from the mine tailings was collecting on the roofs of houses, running into the tanks, and contaminating the water. There are no harmful levels of metals in the rainwater tanks. Two tanks had high levels of zinc due to the nature of their roof and/or tank. The levels are not harmful to health but are high enough to cause an unpleasant taste. We have informed the owners about the high levels of zinc in their tanks.

As the rainwater is untreated and subject to contamination (e.g. from possum and bird faeces on the roof), we advise that **rainwater can be used for drinking and cooking purposes if boiled prior to use.**

I have enclosed a brochure on the use of rainwater tanks.

## Soil

The results of the testing for metals in the soil showed that they were below permitted levels. **It is safe for you to grow vegetables and fruits in your garden, and it is safe for your children to play in your garden.**

## Garden vegetables and fruit

The results of the fruit and vegetable testing were also good. The results show that the levels are below permitted levels in food. **It is safe for you to grow vegetables and fruits in your garden, and for you and your children to eat them.**

## Fish, eels and mussels from the St Paul's River

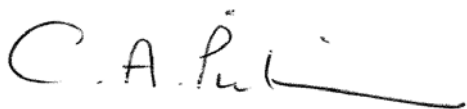
The levels of metals measured in the fish and eels from the St Paul's River are low, and thus pose no health concerns. **It is safe to eat fish and eels caught from the St Paul's River.**

The mussels tested from the St Paul's River were found to contain very high levels of barium, iron, and manganese. If you were to eat these mussels regularly over long periods of time, there could be harmful effects. However, the high levels of manganese and iron would cause an unpleasant taste and this would discourage people from eating them. To minimise any risk from these metals, it is best not to eat mussels. **You should not eat the mussels from the St Paul's River.**

We expect to hold another community meeting in February or early March 2011. At this meeting we will update you on the remediation works and further river sampling (post-remediation); and answer any questions you may have.

If you would like more information, please contact the Public and Environmental Health Service. Phone 1800 671 738 (free call) or email [public.health@dhhs.tas.gov.au](mailto:public.health@dhhs.tas.gov.au)

Yours sincerely



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