

# Govt. scrubbing the floor of the mine

## Overnight fix hopes fast fading

By RUSS PARADICE

The idea of powerwashing the floor of an open pit mine would have seemed borderline ridiculous roughly 10 years ago.

And yet that's part of the work the provincial government has resorted to this summer in its continuing quest to find a way to stop a deadly flow of copper leachates from streaming out of an abandoned Mt. Washington copper mine into the Tsolum River.

The copper pollution has decimated the Tsolum's once-bountiful fish runs.

"The fact we're washing down a small section of the pit floor shows how thorough you have to be when you're dealing with the problem of acid mine drainage," says Murray Galbraith, an official with the provincial Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources who has been working on the project for three years.

Hopes for an overnight fix to the Mt Washington acid mine drainage problem, if they ever really existed, have faded now as the true complexity of the program has become readily apparent.



Crews at work 'washing' down pit floor of abandoned copper mine

The roots of the Mt. Washington problem date back to 1964 when the ill-starred Mt. Washington Mining Co. Ltd. was formed. The company commenced its open pit copper mine mining operation that year, on a slope about five kilometres from where the Mt. Washington ski area is now located. The company fell in to receivership in April 1967 and all operations ceased.

The legacy left behind by the mine was acid mine drainage, the mining industry's number one environmental problem.

The acid mine drainage at Mt. Washington is coming from waste rock left at the site. During the mine's lifetime, about 1.03 million tonnes of waste rock and overburden were produced. This

(Continued on Page 14)

A.

A- →  
 Officials won't know until later if the test work conducted on the site this summer offers a "viable proposition" for giving the problem, says Galbraith, who is a reclamation engineer with the ministry's engineering and inspection branch.  
 If test work is successful, then the ministry will have to decide how to best expand that work next summer, Galbraith says.

5. Father Charles Brandt, who first started lobbying Victoria back in the early 1980s to save the Tsolum, is satisfied the provincial government is committed to solving the acid mine drainage problem.  
 "I'm convinced that they are

B.  
 going to carry through," says Brandt, who recently met with Jack Davis, the minister of energy, mines and petroleum resources, during the Socred cabinet visit to the Comox Valley.

But Brandt interjects a cautionary note for those who think man can fully restore the Tsolum's eco-system.

I'm hopeful that this acid mine drainage problem can be solved," Brandt says. "And I'm hopeful that one day we'll once again have pretty good runs of salmon on the Tsolum. But I don't think we'll ever be able to completely restore the Tsolum.

"Once the bio-diversity of a whole watershed or a river disappears, it can never be recaptured. It can never, never be the same."