

## Understanding Mine Tailings

Mining continues to be an important part of our heritage and economy in the district of Timiskaming. Several Northern Ontario communities are rich in natural ores, earning this region an international reputation for the quality and quantity of our mining resources.

Mine tailings (also called “slimes”) are sand-like waste products of the mining process. In the early mining days, tailings were discarded in low-lying areas or lakes and streams near the mines. Over time, these tailings can move through the environment and may be redistributed over larger areas of land.

Metals and other naturally occurring substances commonly found in the mine tailings include arsenic, mercury, cobalt, and nickel.

Tailings sites can present both physical and chemical health hazards under certain exposure conditions. Where there is no exposure, there is no risk. This means that tailings that have been covered with topsoil and grass are less likely to be a health concern than tailings that are left uncovered.

Exposure to metals found in tailings generally occurs by ingestion. Exposure can also occur by inhaling tailings dust or by absorbing chemicals through the skin. **Exercise caution when visiting areas that contain mine tailings and other mining debris.**

Following some simple precautions will reduce your risk of exposure to elements found in mine tailings:

- ✓ Pay attention to and respect warning signs and fences.
- ✓ Avoid using slimes as areas for recreational activity (especially with young children).
- ✓ Wash hands and face often.
- ✓ Do not use tailings as fill for driveways, gardens or children’s sand boxes.
- ✓ Wash all fruits and vegetables and peel root crops. Avoid eating root vegetables grown directly in tailings.
- ✓ Brush or wash pets to reduce dust.
- ✓ Contact your health care practitioner if you are concerned about your personal health.

