

Kugluktuk official worried over fuel drums in nearby mining camps

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Officials in Kugluktuk, Nunavut, worry the hamlet's drinking water may be at risk of contamination, because they say uranium exploration camps near two lakes are not storing their fuel drums properly.

Deputy Mayor Allen Niptanatiak said earlier this year he saw about 225 fuel drums stored at the camps — located near the Mouse and Kerwin lakes, which connect to the Coppermine River — without bermed containment areas, which would contain a fuel spill.

Without that barrier, any fuel leak could get into the river and thus contaminate Kugluktuk's drinking water, he said.

"Potential for any sort of contamination is there," Niptanatiak told CBC News. "Nobody wants to drink water that is contaminated. Everybody wants good clean water."

Niptanatiak said he wants Unor Inc. and Triex Minerals Corp., which hold the permits for the Mouse Lake and Kerwin Lake camps, respectively, to store the barrels in a bermed area.

But the federal Indian and Northern Affairs Department, which inspects the exploration camps at Mouse and Kerwin lakes, says storing fuel barrels in a bermed area is not required under the permits held by the two companies.

"What Indian and Northern Affairs tries to do through their land use permits is focus on secondary containment rather than berming," said Spencer Dewar, the department's acting director of operations in Iqaluit, adding that secondary containment could include checking for leaks daily.

Both companies are storing their fuel properly, Dewar said.

Unor Inc. president George Bell told CBC News on Tuesday that his company exceeds the regulations by keeping its fuel drums 100 metres away from water, but his staff will meet with Niptanatiak next week to discuss his concerns.

Officials from Triex Minerals Corp. were not available for comment.