

Mines go above and beyond on pandemic safety

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues, the territory's mining industry is demonstrating there is nothing more valued than the health and safety of employees, contractors, and nearby communities.

The mines practise a dizzying list of actions which can include daily health monitoring, temperature checks, 14 days of physical distancing before workers travel to the mines, dedicated charter flights from private air terminals to reduce potential exposure on commercial aircraft and public airport terminals, longer shift rotations to reduce frequency of travel, physical distancing, and enhancing cleaning protocols at mine sites. Another important measure is on-site Covid-19 testing of mine workers.

In the weeks and months ahead, all these measures will remain a key part of Covid-19 management and virus prevention.

On-site testing will be important as jurisdictions across Canada begin to relax measures implemented to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Agnico Eagle, which operates two gold mines in Nunavut, was the first of the northern mining companies to install the GuardRX rapid testing lab for Covid-19 at site for workers. Agnico Eagle began testing Meliadine and Meadowbank mine workers at the beginning of April and, to date, has tested more

than 2,700 workers and all have tested negative for Covid-19.

Baffinland Iron Mines was next to bring in testing for Mary River mine employees. As of last week, approximately 1,400 Mary River employees had been tested for the virus using the GuardRX Covid-19 lab. Baffinland is further examining how it can partner with Nunavut-based organizations to use its testing equipment not only to support community testing for Covid-19 but other medical diagnostics such as tuberculosis.

In May, Rio Tinto's Diavik mine in the Northwest Territories brought in GuardRX, the not-for-profit public health expert, to install an on-site laboratory to establish regular testing of its employees and contractors.

Once in operation, Diavik opened its lab to run tests for its neighbours at the Gahcho Kué mine, operated by De Beers Group. De Beers is testing out-bound staff at Gahcho Kué diamond mine and Snap Lake site, which is in care and maintenance. Samples are being processed at the Diavik lab.

Testing adds to the extensive list of preventative measures already in place at the mines.

As one Northern mine CEO said, the company is "committed to do everything it can to protect people and communities and this



GUEST Comment

Ken Armstrong is the president of the NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines.



photo courtesy of Rio Tinto

Demonstrating their focus on safety, many northern mines have added on-site Covid-19 testing of workers.

testing will add a further layer to the robust precautionary measures."

The Chamber of Mines is confident this commitment to health and safety holds true for all the northern mine operators.

The mines recognize testing of mine workers is a major tool in the arsenal of measures designed to protect workers, contractors and communities.

Installing rapid testing labs at

mine sites goes well beyond the norm in the minerals industry, but then Covid-19 is not a normal virus. Given the long history of strong safety practices and achievements at the mines, the addition of testing workers for the virus should not have come as a surprise.

In this global pandemic, it is often said that "we are all in this together." On-site testing, and all the other measures done to protect

workers, contractors, and communities, is yet another way Northern mines are all continuing to put that sentiment into action.

The Chamber of Mines is very proud of its mining members and their collaborative and focused efforts to protect people and communities.

We tip our hats, yet again, to our mining community for all their efforts and contributions.