

# B. C. TAP WATER ALLIANCE

Caring for, Monitoring, and Protecting  
British Columbia's Community Water Supply Sources

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Media Release

## Withheld Documents Point to Cause of Mount Polley Tailings Disaster

*Vancouver:* An analysis by the Alliance of the Mount Polley Expert Review Panel's January 31, 2015 final report, [Report on Mount Polley Tailings Storage Facility Breach](#), concerning the August 4, 2014 toxic mine tailings breach and inundation disaster at Quesnel Lake, found a total of 21 footnote references to 20 documents (reports, emails, letters, memos and logs) withheld under a temporary legal quarantine by the BC Government for one or two pending investigations. Oddly, **the Panel failed to include page number references** in the 21 footnotes to all of the withheld document sources.

These [footnote references are itemized in a five-page Backgrounder Table](#) published by the Alliance. It includes subject and date information about the withheld documents, and contextual quotes from where they are presented in the Panel's report and appendixes. (In the Alliance's February 1, 2015 media release, [B.C. Government "Removes" 113 Documents](#), is a website link to another Backgrounder Table tool which lists all of the withheld documents and other documents made available to the public but with 'missing' pages.)

The Backgrounder Footnotes Table reveals two reoccurring themes chronicled from the Panel's references concerning the Mount Polley Tailings Storage Facility – a "chronic water-surplus problem" and a "recurring problem of tailings beach development." These themes, examined in the Alliance's preliminary December 1, 2014 [Scene of the Crime report](#), and in the Panel's final report, underlie the Mount Polley Mining Corporation's repeated or "chronic" failure for procedural maintenance (what the Panel refers to as "departures from approval") of the Facility's structural integrity. For at least three decades, professional engineers have stated that the predominantly Upstream design used for staged construction of Mount Polley's Perimeter Embankment has resulted in numerous tailings dam failures all over the world. They have repeatedly cautioned since the 1980s that such a construction design is unsuitable for storing (supernatant) water. As the Panel also pointed out in its report, the breach occurred because the Company failed to properly buttress the Perimeter Embankment since at least 2005, the failure zone having an over-steep, 1.3 (horizontal) to 1.0 (vertical) 'As-Built' slope.

"As there are two pending government investigations, the final verdict is not yet out on what caused the toxic mine tailings failure, one of the largest disasters by volume in world history," notes Will Koop, BC Tap Water Alliance Coordinator. "There are strong clues and common themes found in the Panel's final report to the Government's withheld documents pointing to liability themes: the ongoing presence of excess water and interrelated and consequential problems of improper tailings beach development (improper buffering). We are also deeply concerned that the BC Liberal administration has **recently approved, in principle, re-start of the Mount Polley mine** (pending 30 day, April 2015 public consultation) **BEFORE** the conclusion and reporting of the remaining legal investigations."

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Website link: <http://www.bctwa.org/MountPolley-Backgrounder-Apr6-2015.pdf>