

Dear Minister

This correspondence was drafted and approved by a Committee of concerned citizens which includes six effected residents, two Town Councillors, a legal advisor, and a School Board representative. All Committee members have read and signed this correspondence.

### BACKGROUND

On November 1, 1995 the Nova Scotia Department of the Environment's original Environmental Assessment for Pioneer Coal's operation in Stellarton indicated at section 2.0(1):

“Blasting is not permitted.”

A second approval for the Stellarton Pit Mine Extension dated February 3, 2004 indicated at section 9.2:

“Blasting is not permitted.”

Pioneer Coal is now seeking an amendment to the Approval to allow for blasting. This came to the attention of Stellarton residents who attended a Public Information Session held by Pioneer Coal on April 30, 2014.

Following this meeting two attendees and residents of the Town of Stellarton sponsored an ad in the local newspaper for a public meeting on May 6 at 6:30 informing residents of Stellarton of Pioneer Coal's request.

Well over 100 people attended this meeting which was held at the Museum of Industry. At this meeting 114 people signed a document stating that the Province should do a full Environmental Assessment including alternative and more independent opinions from qualified experts. The concerns listed in this document were:

1. GR Saunders Elementary School is located less than 500 meters from the mine;
2. Effect of blasting on coal dust levels;
3. Health risks associated with coal dust;
4. Effect of blasting on nearby foundations;
5. Effects of blasting on numerous old mine shafts underneath the Town;
6. Effects of blasting and further deepening the pit on underground water levels.

One attendee brought an article from the Canadian Mining Journal from May 2010 promoting the Stellarton Pit Mine entitled “Coal mine fits right in with the community”. Pioneer Coal's John Chisholm is quoted in this article as saying the following, (emphasis added):

“If it a producing coal mine and like all open-pit mines, there is a certain amount of noise and dust associated with it. Not a whole lot our case, mind you, because there's no blasting on the site and most of the drilling and digging now deep within the mine and out of sight and earshot of the surface”

This Journal and this article is available on line.

During the meeting a number of persons volunteered to form a Committee to provide public input, and obtain input from the Town. Members attended several Town Council meetings. Several letters were written from the Town of Stellarton to you.

Town Councillors Juidith MacLellan and Ken Francis joined this committee. Eleven other members of the community also attended.

### PIONEER COAL'S PUBLIC INFORMATION SESSION

It has been noted by Committee members that the public consultation notice published in the Evening News made no reference to blasting, just that "proposed changes to extraction methods".

Pioneer Coal in Attachment 3 to their Request to Amend lists out a summary of stakeholder responses and concerns raised by the public. The members of this Committee agree that many persons who attended this session asked the following question which is not included in Pioneer Coal's summary:

"How long will the blasting go on for?"

Committee members who attended and asked this question were told by Pioneer's representatives that it would be three years.

### COMMITTEE CONCERNS

The concerns of Committee representatives met most recently upon being informed by you that we had until September 22, 2014 to express our concerns to you. Members met on September 17, 2014. The concerns the Committee members have include the following:

1. If blasting is approved, that pre blast and detailed inspections and pictures of residents foundations should be performed for comparison purposes after the blasting. The rationale provided by Pioneer Coal's submission to not conduct these was met with scepticism by Committee members. It is true that over time basements will deteriorate but the time frames involved in the proposal to blast is short enough that this should not be a concern.
2. The owner of the mine implied in the Journal article that increased dust levels are caused by blasting. Common sense would indicate this. Dozens of homes are located with 500 meters of the mine, as well as an Elementary School. There is already a large amount of dust coming from a large mountain of shale and dirt surrounding the Open Pit. The Mountain can be seen from miles away and from most vantage points within the Town. The health effects of this alone are very worrisome, let alone the effects of blasting which will make a bad situation much worse.
3. What will be the effect on the Town's infrastructure including sewer and water lines.
4. Natural gas lines are being installed throughout Stellarton. Were the authors of the studies submitted by the proponents made aware of this?
5. That a tight time limit and scope be established if blasting is approved. Pioneer Coal's submission marks off a relatively small area of land but Committee members are sceptical that Pioneer Coal's blasting, once approved, will end at the area indicated, or in any reasonable timeline.
6. The Town has not had sufficient time to draft a response nor were Town Council aware of a deadline for their submission. The next meeting of Town Council is October 6, 2014.

## COMMITTEE REQUEST

The Committee requests the following:

1. That a full scale Environmental Assessment be conducted prior to approving blasting;
2. That Independent experts be hired to provide alternative opinions to those of the experts hired by Pioneer Coal;
3. That any decision be postponed and that more formal mechanisms be put in place to obtain feedback from citizens of the Town, including an effectively advertised meeting where you will agree to attend;
4. That you attend in Stellarton and view the mountain of shale and dirt from various vantage points, or stand on the mountain so as to view the ease with which dust from blasting would spread throughout the community, including the school in such close proximity;
5. That time be permitted for the Town Council to provide an expression of opinion.

Committee members are against the notion of blasting primarily because of the following:

1. Effect on already bad dust levels;
2. Effect on the children in the community including those attending the G.R. Saunders School;
3. Risk to resident's foundations;
4. Risk to town infrastructure;
5. The fragile base of the town including many old mine shafts;

However, if you are not inclined to deny the request, we ask for more time and more study.