

N.L. wants AbitibiBowater to pay up

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Jim Molloy, a former mill worker, says AbitibiBowater should pay to clean up the former mill site in Grand Falls-Windsor.

The Newfoundland and Labrador government argued in the Supreme Court of Canada Wednesday that AbitibiBowater should pay for an environmental mess left behind when it closed its mill in Grand Falls-Windsor.

The pulp and paper company said that because of creditor protection laws, the company is no longer responsible for the cleanup.

The province's lawyer, David Wingfield, said Abitibi has legally-binding environmental obligations.

"The person responsible for the pollution, that has some connection to the polluting event, is responsible for cleaning it up, so the public purse does not have to do so," said Wingfield.

The province estimates cleaning up the mill, along with four other former Abitibi sites, will cost more than \$100 million.

AbitibiBowater is arguing that Newfoundland and Labrador assumed the responsibility for the cleanup when the province expropriated the company's assets, thus becoming the new owner.

AbitibiBowater lawyer Sean Dunphy said the province should have negotiated a settlement along with other creditors instead of expropriating the company's assets in Grand Falls-Windsor.

"There is nothing in what is being advocated for that acts as any kind of get-out-of-jail-free card in terms of environmental stewardship," said Dunphy.

Residents of the former mill town of Grand Falls-Windsor who have been waiting for more than two years for the site to be cleaned up are watching the case closely.

"Abitibi should get the bill to clean it up, it has to be cleaned up," said Jim Molloy, a resident of Grand Falls-Windsor who spent nearly four decades reporting to work at the mill.

Molloy said the case is personal to him not only because he worked at the mill, but because the former mill site is right beside his home. He wants to see new operators in the mill because after seeing the mess inside, he believes tearing it down will cost too much money.

"Just in the sulphate mill where I worked, there's five 52-foot by 20-foot digesters with double brick linings in them. Just taking these down would be a monstrous job," said Molloy.

"What I would like to see is a smaller industry move in and take advantage of the equipment in the mill, give a bit of employment in the town, and utilize the thing, because I don't think that it's humanly possible to dismantle that mill as it is."

Grand Falls-Windsor mayor Al Hawkins agrees with Molloy and is insisting that AbitibiBowater be sent the bill to clean up the facility.

"The property now is getting to be dilapidated and obviously there's going to be concerns, safety concerns, and issues that either we'll find someone to move into that property or have a demolition on the property, said Hawkins.

The company is currently doing business as Resolute Forest Products.