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**Health and Social Services Minister Glenn Hart Comments on Swift River Lodge Closure**

WHITEHORSE – Yukoners and visitors to Yukon expect the food and water they consume in restaurants, lodges and other facilities to be safe. The Yukon *Public Health and Safety Act* requires government officials to take steps to prevent and address risks to public health.

The Environmental Health Services branch of the Department of Health and Social Services works with private business owners to identify risks and to develop solutions to meet health and safety standards.

The branch has worked with the Swift River Lodge owners since May 2004. On many occasions, environmental health officers visited the lodge and found severe risks to public health that could not be ignored, including a failed sewage disposal system. The failed system threatened the water supply because raw human sewage was being discharged within 36 feet of the drinking water well.

The restaurant was in a state of disrepair, such that it was not possible to keep it sufficiently clean to meet health standards.

Recognizing the dilemma faced by the owners, Environmental Health Services worked closely with them in an attempt to mitigate the problems. The branch provided several deadline extensions to allow the owners to replace the failed sewage disposal system and to secure additional land and financing.

The branch allowed the owners to open the motel and provide public access to washrooms, subject to posting signs regarding tap water safety. The branch also allowed them to keep open parts of the business that were not affected by the public health risks, including the gas bar and gift shop, and to continue the sale of prepackaged food and drink.

Environmental Health Services provided information on appropriate treatment systems for drinking water. Officials allowed the owners to remove sewage from the failed system and transport it on a public highway to a sewage pit maintained by the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Every effort was made to help the owners make this facility safe for Yukoners and visitors, from a public health perspective.

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Contact:

Emily Younker  
Cabinet Communications  
867-633-7961  
[emily.younker@gov.yk.ca](mailto:emily.younker@gov.yk.ca)