

Winnipeg Free Press Jan. 27, 2023 Environmental concerns

Re: *Firm seeks to build solar panel manufacturing plant in Manitoba* (Jan. 18) This article states pure quartz silica obtained from a Sio Silica mining and processing facility near Vivian would be used for a proposed RCT Solutions GmbH solar manufacturing plant. Sio Silica plans to mine silica sand from the sandstone aquifer of southeast Manitoba, using an unproven airlift well extraction method. Mining in an aquifer used for drinking water is not normally allowed. For instance, proposals to mine for gold near Shoal Lake, the source of Winnipeg's drinking water, have not proceeded.

Pure quartz for solar manufacturing is normally obtained from the mining of very pure quartz rock not silica sand. To be used for solar manufacturing, the silica sand would require extensive purification, likely requiring strong acids and other toxic chemicals. Purification of the silica sand on a commercial scale to obtain the required purity has not been demonstrated. Toxic waste from this process would require specialized treatment and licensed disposal. Potentially toxic waste generated from purification has not been characterized and assessed by Sio Silica.

Clean Environment Commission hearings currently underway are mandated to assess the environmental effects of mining the silica sand from the sandstone aquifer that is separated by a layer of shale from the carbonate aquifer above. Both these valuable regional aquifers are at risk from the mining operations.

DENNIS LENEVEU

Selkirk