

My friends,

PLEASE read this info. below. The Attawapiskat (Cree) Nation in Canada truly needs our help to put pressure on the Canadian govt. to help these children and the adults too!

To start, here is a petition link. Please sign and help these people in a VERY remote place get the help they urgently need! I thank you!!!

Petition:

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/chstrahlatt/>

Write Prime Minister Stephen Harper:

pm@pm.gc.ca

Register complaints about Indian Affairs handling of this:

CNAP-NACC@ainc-inac.gc.ca

Stories about the Attawapiskat:

The Chief and Council of the Attawapiskat first Nation decided, in early 1990, to pursue self governance in education. They appointed a local education authority and assumed control of J. R. Nakogee Elementary School in August of 1990. A secondary school program was added in August of 1991. In April 1992, full fiscal and administrative responsibility was vested in the Attawapiskat First Nation Education Authority who, by mandate from the Chief and Council, has responsibility for all educational programs in Attawapiskat.

Early in the year 2000 the Education Authority learned that an old oil spill was endangering the school, making it unsafe for staff and students. From what the Authority has been able to learn, a major oil spill occurred in the winter of 1979, resulting from a break in the underground oil distribution line to the school. At the time of the rupture, and subsequent leakage, the school and its maintenance was under the direction of Indian Affairs. INAC installed, operated, and maintained the feeder line to the school. The length of time the rupture went undetected is not certain, however it is estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 gallons of fuel oil was spilled - making this one of the largest spills in Northern Ontario.

There have been at least 6 studies of the problem, with attempts to remediate. The latest study, commissioned by the Authority in late 1999, indicated that

the area, and the school was still contaminated. The main identified contaminants include Benzene, Toluene, Ethyl Benzene, and Xylenes. All of these have very serious health effects on humans. At least one of these is an admitted carcinogenic agent, and some or all of them are known to have impact on human skin, blood, immune system and the nervous system. Several students have exhibited symptoms such as those that might be expected from exposure to these chemicals. In any event there is more than enough evidence for parents to be concerned about the health and safety of the students in these surroundings.

The National Classification System for Contaminated Sites (NCSCS) is a qualitative risk assessment designed to evaluate the impact of site contamination on human and environmental health. Based on known or estimated contaminant characteristics, exposure pathways, and potential receptors, sites are scored out of 100. The school received a total score of 89 out of 100 where the threshold for Class 1 is 70. Classification as a Class 1 site indicates that the risk potential for adverse impact on human or environmental health is high, with action required. The tri-plex teacherage received a score of 85 and Health Canada ordered that it be closed and demolished.

Following the release of this report, the parents, staff and students became very concerned. Following a spontaneous demonstration, the Chief and Council, on the recommendation of the Education Authority, ordered the school to be closed.

Current Situation

Since the Attawapiskat First Nation was forced to close it's elementary school in May, 2000, this community's students have been receiving their elementary education in a series of portables. Money that had been allocated for the renovation of the deteriorating physical condition of the 25 year old frame construction school was used to fund the construction of 8 double and 3 single portable classrooms. This was supposed to be a very temporary measure. The facilities are basic with none of the supplementary resources schools in other parts of the province take for granted.

Parents are now starting to hold their children back from attending the school, or are seeking education in other communities. The situation is deteriorating since quality education cannot be offered in the present facilities.

A recent study (B. H. Martin) indicates that the total area available for instruction is only about 50% of the space allocated in Indian Affairs' School Space Accommodation Standards. Would this be tolerated in any Public, or Separate, Board of Education?

This situation has been present for 5 years now - a long time in the life of a child! A new school was promised by the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs in the summer of 2000, but no action has been taken, and the Community's children continue to suffer. The Education Authority's Chairman summed up the community's plight by saying; "We just want what any other parent would want for their children - a safe school."