



ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP UNIT



*First Nations Environmental Health Resources Project
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Background

The state of environmental health plays an immense role in the lives of First Nation peoples.

Many continue to rely heavily on the environment for their subsistence, including their social, cultural, economic and physical survival.

First Nation dependence on the land has unfortunately presented higher than 'normal' risks to health.

First Nation peoples across Canada are deeply concerned about environmental health issues related to deteriorating air quality, the need to address chronic drinking water contamination problems, exposure to chemical contaminants and toxins in food, and the potential long-term impacts of climate change.



Barriers to First Nations

First Nation involvement and interventions into environmental processes, assessments and impact analyses have been hampered by a number of reasons:

- Lack of capacity within the First Nation community;
- Lack of resources and expertise to properly monitor the environment;
- Lack of awareness of which office to file for interventions or request inspection services;
- Inability to navigate through complex regulatory frameworks; and
- Lack of knowledge of relevant legislation.



The Resources Project

The AFN receives numerous requests from First Nation communities for information so they may begin community-driven initiatives.

The AFN is responding with the creation of a resource kit with information modules to effectively meet First Nation needs on addressing environmental health concerns. They include three categories of information.

- How the environment impacts First Nation health;
- Ways and means of creating healthy environments; and,
- Community-based environmental health research and surveillance activities.



First Nation Requirements

In 2007, the AFN set out to:

- Determine the nature and extent of perceived environmental health problems faced by First Nation Communities.
- Assess culturally sensitive needs in terms of gaps in awareness.

This was done via a survey that solicited information on current knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning these issues.



Environmental Health Survey

The AFN decided to develop questionnaires for different target groups;

- community leaders,
- secondary school students (youth),
- the general community, and
- persons with environmental health program knowledge (practitioners)

The questions on each survey were similar in terms of information. However, they were designed to be answered by the particular target group by using a phraseology most familiar to the group and their expected level of awareness.



Survey Results

Type Survey	Questionnaires received		# Males		# Females	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
General	204	41%	74	37%	126	63%
Leaders	119	24%	42	37%	74	63%
Technical	10	2%	1	11%	9	89%
Youth	154	31%	78	51%	76	49%
Telephone	9	2%	3	33%	6	67%
Total:	496	100%	198	41%	291	59%



General Survey

- In this survey, 50% of all respondents were between the ages of 40-59 years of age, with the highest number belonging to the age group of 50-59.
- 22% said they had contacted the government for assistance to solve an environmental health problem, but only 12% said the requested assistance was given.
- Concerning the question on whether or not the Band Office had provided information about environmental health problems, 40% responded positively. Of those that said the band office provided information 72% said it was helpful.



General Survey Cont.

Issues considered as community problems are as follows:

- Water quality issues*
- Flood Preparation **
- Landfill issues
- Mold in housing units
- Community cleanup
- Substance abuse
- Chemical spills; and,
- Sexually transmitted diseases.



Leadership Survey

- 119 responses or 24% of all questionnaires received.
- Of those responding, 37% were male and 63% female.
- 52% of the respondents were between the ages of 40-59 years of age, with the highest number belonging to the age group of 50-59.
- Although 77% said there was a person responsible for environmental health in their community, only 38% said that person was effective.
- 36% said they had contacted the government for assistance to solve an environmental health problem, but only 21% said that assistance was given.



Leadership Survey Cont.

Leaders said community members need more information on:

- Mold prevention and removal*
- Safe drinking water and sewage disposal**
- Rodent/ vector control
- General community cleanliness
- Home owner responsibilities
- Public safety
- Water pollution
- Environmental awareness
- Airborne industrial air pollution
- Climate change



Technical Survey

- The Technical Survey was designed and intended for those persons responsible for some aspect of environmental health in their community. However, only 10 people responded.
- As for health conditions observed by technical staff; the following is in order of prevalence:
 - Upper respiratory illness: 50%
 - Cancer: 30%
 - Skin diseases/ infections: 20%
 - Diarrhea/ upset stomach: 10%
 - Accidents: 10%



Youth Survey

- This survey was conducted in 8 schools located in AB, BC, NT, ON and SK.
- One hundred and fifty-four students were involved in the survey.
- 78 were male and 76 female.
- Of this group, 31% were below 15 years and 69% above 15 years of age.



Youth Survey Cont.

The following topics (listed in priority) were considered to be of concern:

1. Poor waste disposal practices
2. Poor drinking water quality
3. Climate change impacts
4. Poor indoor air quality
5. Infrastructure hazards
6. Environmental damage from industrial processes
7. Environmental safety hazards
8. Contaminants in traditional foods
9. Poor outdoor air quality
10. Poor occupational safety & health
11. Toxic chemicals & contaminated sites:
12. Noise pollution
13. Radiation exposure



Phone Survey

- Due to the nature of this survey (cooperation is difficult) only 9 persons responded, representing only 2% of all those surveyed.
- Mold in homes and drinking water quality were considered to be the most serious issue.



General Findings

- Communities are dependent upon outside assistance for most of their needs.
- It appears that such outside intervention is either difficult to find or entirely unavailable.
- Community-based action is therefore limited to clean-up days.
- While participants in the survey had some knowledge about environmental health issues, many of them were not sure about basic procedures to correct problems.



General Findings Cont.

- 76% of those surveyed said they would participate in community-based projects;
- They would like a list of funding sources for projects, or at least a set of educational materials;
- It is interesting to note that climate change was a priority issue of concern with the younger generation, but not the older generations.
- Where the Band Office provided information on environmental health, most respondents said it was helpful.



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Thank you

