



Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

Chief Beverly Cook
Chief Ron LaFrance Jr.
Chief Eric Thompson
Sub-Chief Shelley Jacobs
Sub-Chief Michael L. Conners
Sub-Chief Cheryl Jacobs

NEWS RELEASE

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For more information:
Communications Department
Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe
Tel: (518) 358-2272

SAINT REGIS MOHAWK TRIBES REACTS TO EXCEEDANCE LEVELS AT GENERAL MOTORS REMEDIATION SITE

Urges for more Air Monitoring and Community Updates

AKWESASNE, NY— The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council expressed its ongoing dissatisfaction with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on its handling of the remediation project at the former-General Motors property. In a letter to the EPA Region 2 Remedial Project Manager, Tribal Council continued to urge for more updates and safety measures in order to prevent further exposure by local residents of PCB-contaminated materials. The request comes as exceedance levels continue to be reported.

“We are urging the EPA to take the public’s health and safety into consideration all the time, not just when work is being performed,” noted Tribal Chief Eric Thompson. He added, “There have been instances of high wind gusts when there was no work that would have exceeded safe levels. We feel that elevated levels would have been reported and insist that monitoring be conducted during the weekend to collect more data and obtain a complete picture of air quality.”

In early-May of 2015, strong wind gusts were reported in the area that concerned tribal leaders and residents located in close proximity to the remediation site. The winds had the potential to disperse contaminated materials downwind toward nearby homes and a school. As a result, the Tribal Council urged the EPA to place an additional air monitoring station during Memorial Day weekend at the Akwesasne Freedom School located a short distance from the work site.

“The Tribal Council continues to find the EPA’s response to our community’s concerns unacceptable,” stated Tribal Chief Beverly Cook. She noted, “We have been the ones proposing safety measures and request that work stop when air quality levels are exceeded. It’s becoming more apparent however, that the EPA only takes action when the Tribe insists more be done to protect our people and our environment.”

Continued

The Tribal Council also previously urged that the amount of time to receive air quality results be decreased to provide real-time information. They found the initial four-day turnaround to be unacceptable, as exceedances aren't known until days after the occurrence. The resulting measure implemented at Tribal Council's insistence was able to decrease the amount of time to obtain lab results by two days, which is the shortest amount of time for the EPA's analytic lab to deliver air quality results.

"We're continuing to urge the EPA to be more proactive, responsive and accountable to our community's concerns," noted Tribal Chief Ron Lafrance. He added, "They need to err on the side of caution and shut down remediation efforts when safe air quality levels are exceeded. They also need to be here to address many of the concerns and questions that community members have about the remediation project."

The Tribal Council requested that arrangements be made for the EPA Community Involvement Coordinator to provide regular updates to the Akwesasne community. They recommended that periodic press releases be provided, as well as a community presentation by the Community Involvement Coordinator to answer questions and report on remediation efforts.

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The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is the duly elected and federally recognized government of the Saint Regis Mohawk People.