

# INDIGENOUS ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK



December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008

Letter of support for the Safe Drinking Water Foundation

The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) was formed by grassroots Indigenous peoples and individuals in 1990 to address environmental and economic justice issues (EJ) within the USA. IEN's activities include building the capacity of Indigenous communities and tribal governments to develop mechanisms to protect our sacred sites, land, water, air, natural resources, health of both our people and all living things, and to build economically sustainable communities. IEN accomplishes this by maintaining an informational clearinghouse, organizing campaigns, direct actions and public awareness, building the capacity of communities and tribes to address EJ issues, development of initiatives to impact policy, and building alliances among Indigenous communities, tribes, inter-tribal and Indigenous organizations, people-of-color/ethnic organizations, faith-based and women's groups, youth, labor, environmental organizations and others.

We are fighting climate injustices against native communities on many fronts. Indigenous peoples in the United States, Canada and the Americas have experienced systematic and repeated violations by oil, gas, and mining industries infringing on their inherent right to protect traditional lands and treaty rights. These industries violate human rights and create unconscionable destruction to traditional territories that have sustained indigenous livelihoods for time immemorial. A recent major IEN battleground has been the tar sands development in Alberta, Canada. In 2007, over 60,000 applications for "new projects" in the tar sands were put forward with over 97 per cent of them approved by the Alberta government. Canada's tar patch has become the wild west of the global oil frontier and home to a new breed of private oil firm cowboys and climate change outlaws. Alberta represents the largest private oil patch on the planet (roughly 3,000 km<sup>2</sup>) with 177 billion barrels of recoverable oil in its provincial deposits alone. It nonetheless charges the lowest land leasing rates and royalty regime on the planet. On top of this, private oil companies send the majority of tar sands synthetic crude to the United States for refinement who then turn around and sell it back to Canadians as market-ready fuels.

As if these facts are not degrading enough in themselves, water which has been used in the oil fields processes has been discarded into lagoon, after lagoon, after lagoon! Many of which appear to be leaking although no official and scientific process has been determined to effectively treat this "Crude H2O" in order that it can safely be released back into our environment once again. Subsequently, we see significant and unacceptable increases in water borne health issues among our people affected by contaminated water.



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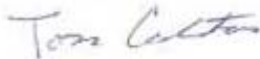
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During the last decade, we have been consistently impressed with the work of the Safe Drinking Water Foundation (SDWF), they have created school programs on water quality, water pollution, as well as how water affects peoples' health, the economics of water, and Operation Water Spirit (OWS), an indigenous perspective of water issues from kindergarten to grade 12. OWS is empowering to our next generation of Aboriginal decision makers, while it also teaches our cultural philosophies to non-Aboriginal students.

While SDWF education programs have been endorsed and recognized across North America by organizations such as National Science Teachers Association, SDWF scientists have also worked diligently to educate Water Treatment Operators and leadership from many Aboriginal communities, forming the Advanced Aboriginal Water Treatment Team (AAWTT) in 2004. SDWF scientists have developed sustainable solutions for treating the most challenging of source waters and are educating Aboriginal people to enable them to make informed good decisions. Indeed the first community to benefit from SDWF solutions was Yellow Quill First Nation in SK. After a nine year boil water advisory their drinking water now meets not only rather lax Canadian Drinking Water Quality Guidelines, but also the more stringent U.S. and European regulations.

The SDWF is now introducing a Community Framework for Safe Drinking Water, a project which will provide templates and checklists as well as scientific advice and recommendations to ensure that the smallest of communities are given the knowledge and ability to effectively produce safe drinking water. This project will be developed with support from Napier University in Scotland over the next four years and will redefine the future of water treatment, not only in Canada but for Aboriginal communities in USA and around the world. The IEN is proud of our involvement with SDWF, we encourage you to support SDWF and, in particular, their AAWTT to help Aboriginal communities become responsible for the health of their communities via the quality of their drinking water.

Sincerely,



Tom Goldtooth  
Executive Director, Indigenous Environmental Network

"If there's no action before 2012, that's too late. What we do in the next two to three years will determine our future. This is the defining moment."

Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Valencia, Spain, Nov. 17, 2007