

**For Immediate Release
Tuesday April 14th, 2009**



SASKATOON – The Safe Drinking Water Foundation (SDWF)'s Advanced Aboriginal Water Treatment Team (AAWTT) released their Position Paper on the Federal Engagement Sessions for First Nations Drinking Water today. The position has the support of the Indigenous Environmental Network, the Polaris Institute, Sierra Club Canada, Canadian Labour Congress and Maude Barlow, who is both the chairperson for the Council of Canadians and Senior Advisor on Water to the President of the United Nations Assembly.

The AAWTT feels that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)'s engagement sessions and attempts to deal with First Nations drinking water quality are utterly inadequate, to the point of diminishing First Nation Treaty Rights. The position paper documents the issues and recommends solutions.

“This document just uncovers the tip of the iceberg,” said Dr. Hans Peterson, Executive Director of SDWF, **“Were the Auditor General to launch a full inquiry into INAC’s allocation of funds for First Nation water projects and the inaccurate assessment of water quality by Health Canada, the sponsorship scandal would pale in comparison.”**

Additional statements of support:

“Engineers should be held accountable for selecting water treatment systems for First Nation Communities that are capable of meeting, at minimum, the Canadian Drinking Water Quality Guidelines.”

Dan Hogan, P.Eng., Former President, Professional Engineers of Saskatchewan
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“INAC has spent over \$7 million on our water treatment plant in the last 4 years, but this is a plant that is full of problems, making it very difficult for our water keepers to produce quality water. The federal government needs to find solutions that work for remote communities, such as ours. Throwing money alone at it doesn't work.”

Chief Rose Laboucan, Driftpile First Nation
Contact: 780-355-3868 or 780-523-0520

“The biggest problem with water treatment plants built on reserves is that they don't have to produce safe drinking water.”

Bob Pratt, Circuit Rider, Touchwood Tribal Council
Founding member of AAWTT
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“To this day Health Canada (HC) claims our community does not need a Boil Water Advisory (BWA), despite this being recommended by our water treatment equipment manufacturer as well as scientists from the Safe Drinking Water Foundation. Instead, Health Canada picks and chooses parameters from provincial or federal water quality guidelines to suit their political agenda. Saddle Lake leadership has implemented a BWA since 2004 despite poor advice from HC.”

Tony Steinhauer, Water Keeper Saddle Lake Cree Nation and founding member of the AAWTT
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“In 2002 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada spent \$5M on a new water treatment system for our community of around 400 people. To this day we have not been able to commission the plant, it sits idle and our people still don’t have safe drinking water. I have notified INAC that we have noticeable seepage from our sewage lagoons and they ignore our requests for help. We are under 3rd party management meaning we have absolutely no say in the financial transactions that are supposed to benefit our people.”

Marcel Shonias, Water Keeper and Councilor Gullbay First Nation
Ph: 807-982-0006

“We do not have the technical expertise, the knowledge, or access to funding; to ensure we are able to make the best decisions for our community or to ensure that INAC makes the best decisions on our behalf. We got an incomplete wastewater treatment system eight years ago that was never able to be maintained properly. INAC needs to make sure that water and wastewater systems have a hope of functioning in our remote communities.”

Chief Mandamin.

Shoal Lake First Nation, Band #39
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For more information, please see the report online at:

<http://www.safewater.org/PDFS/frontpage/EngagementSessionsFinalApril15.pdf>

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