

• More Letters

Theodore Mala
Dept. of Health
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Dear Commissioner:

As a concerned Native citizen, I am writing to urge you to act on several environmental and health oriented resolutions passed by the Alaska Federation of Natives at the annual convention. It is essential that steps be taken to break the cycle of environmental and health problems that continue to plague Native Alaskans. I have seen our land and water polluted, and I have seen my family and community members become sick as a direct result of this pollution. Committed action must, therefore, be taken to revive the health of our people and our land.

Resolution 92-94 deals with military contamination and hazardous waste disposal. I am particularly concerned with Sparrvohn at the headwaters of the village of Stony River. The waste from this site continues to pollute the river and harm our people. I urge you to work to support the responsible handling of currently produced hazardous wastes and previous hazards waste sites.

Resolution 92-97 deals with nuclear use and disposal sites. We are all well aware of the high seismic activity in Alaska. I am concerned about the possibility of a radioactive catastrophe at Ft. Greely in the event of an earthquake in the vicinity of nuclear plant or disposal site.

Resolution 92-30 deals with toxic and heavy metal contamination in Arctic waters. Since village women have gone to Anchorage to deliver children, doctors have discovered high levels of mercury in their blood. Considering the large percentage of fish in Native diet, it is particularly pertinent that action be taken to reduce the toxic and heavy metals that find their way into our food chain.

Resolutions 92-31 and 92-33 both deal with safe drinking water in the villages. Radon in our water has become a particular problem. Since we received tap water 28 years ago, the rate of cancer has increased. I am concerned that the levels of radon in

our drinking water are often underestimated. I understand the life cycle of radon is 30 hours. The time it takes for water sample collection in rural villages, transportation and processing at distant labs is often over 30 hours. Something must be done to obtain an accurate estimate of the radon levels in our village's drinking water, and something must be done to reduce those levels of radon.

Resolution 92-32 deals with the improvement and construction of roads in our villages. Roads are definitely needed to improve village infrastructure. However, the dust generated by gravel roads is very hard on asthmatic people, especially since Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is a notoriously windy place. I spoke with

people from the Northwest Territory in Canada and learned that they use calcium chloride to keep down the amount of dust that blows up from their roads. Perhaps a similar approach could be used here.

Granted, all of these issues are very complex, and they cannot be solved overnight. Nonetheless, a concerted effort must be immediately taken if we are to even begin to resolve the myriad of health and environmental problems that afflict our native villages. Once again, I urge you to take action on these AFN Resolutions and help make Alaska a healthier and more environmentally sound place.

Sincerely,
Matthew Bean
Bethel