

Environmental Racism  
Personal Account by Donna Dumas  
For consideration as part of Support of Bill C-226

*“Environmental racism in Canada has impacted a lot of lives. Including myself, my family, my community members. And our generations going forward. And someone, and when I say someone I mean the government, has to start owning up to its responsibilities. To clean up and to compensate for what has happened to our people. And not only our people, but our environment, and our animals. This was our way of living. And this is the way we were used to live is through the land. Our water is sacred. The animals are sacred. The plants are sacred, these are medicines.”*

**Diesel & Toxic Contamination in Mathias Colomb Cree Nation**

The Community of MCCN (Mathias Colomb Cree Nation), known as Pukatawagan, Manitoba is situated 850 Kilometers northwest of Winnipeg.

The article in the Free Press (attached) states the saga dates back to the 1950s, when Manitoba Hydro set up a diesel fuel generating station to heat the communities nursing station, school and a nunnery for missionaries. The tanks leaked, which was believed to have been undetected for 30 years, while people in the community reported ailments that they couldn't explain.

These ailments include migraines, rashes, hair loss, skin diseases, heart problems and miscarriages and Cancers. It is noted since the settlement from the Government of 17 million there had been many related Cancer deaths.

The article notes in 1989, a fuel spill that saturated the ground was discovered under the school by accident. The building and schools were eventually demolished. ie: business complex, nursing station and nunnery, including two other buildings near the contaminated site.

Recently, Donna Dumas contacted Steph McLachlan on issues pertaining to this contamination. In this article it has been noted that any member of the community can seek compensation for health related illness. Donna is the youngest of eight siblings. They lived 7 miles off the reserve where the train stopped. Their father worked for Canadian National Railway until his retirement and the family moved to the community afterwards. During the cleanup at Pukatawagan, Mile 99 was also cleaned up, where it was believed the spill happened.

CN transported this fuel in tanks to be delivered into the community by a fuel truck. During this transportation of this fuel it was spilled into the ground and seeped into the lake, where the locals of Mile 99 consumed it as their main drinking water.

Donna's mother died from stomach cancer, her uncle also died of cancer a couple years ago, and her eldest brother had prostate cancer and is in remission. The family all underwent

colonoscopies and all had polyps removed. They all have been affected with heart problems and other related cancer issues that are now being investigated.

*“Our fathers, our grandfathers, our brothers who were trappers. Who are still trappers that are still trying to rely on trapping and to feed their families. They no longer can sustain their way of living because a lot this contamination has eroded the lands. And the medicines. And the animals. So...Now, we have to do something. If it doesn’t come from us, who will? Not the government. The government are the ones who are silencing us all by giving us - giving us nothing. Giving us piddly handouts. Promises and promises of this and that. Meanwhile our lands are eroding. And our people are eroding. I believe this is all part of assimilation. And I thank you for taking the time for listening what I have to say on environmental racism. Thank you.”*



Donna Dumas pictured with her siblings



Donna's mom, Mary Dumas, pictured with her family at HSC before passing away from cancer. Donna filed a complaint to the Health Authority of Pukatawagan in 2006 for the way her mother was treated by the health system during this time.

# \$17-M toxic spill settlement a victory: chief

By Alexandra Paul

A tentative \$17-million settlement to compensate for toxic fuel spills that went undetected for years marks a definite victory for Pukatawagan, leaders of the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation said Tuesday.

"It's been a long process. The community has worked diligently on this for the past 22 years," Chief Arlen Dumas said. "We are now in a position to rebuild the infrastructure we lost to diesel spills over the years."

The chief and the entire council of the MCCN, located 850 kilometres northwest of Winnipeg, travelled to Winnipeg to announce the federal settlement at the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs' downtown offices.

Pukatawagan's leaders are recommending the community accept the deal in a ratification vote. A voting process, including information sessions, is to take place in late February and early March.

Nothing in the compensation settlement will stop individuals from suing the federal government on their own for health problems that may be related to the toxic spills, Dumas said.

The saga dates back to the 1950s, when Manitoba Hydro set up a diesel fuel generating station to heat the community's nursing station, school and a nunnery for missionaries.

The tanks were placed above ground and pipes underground connected the buildings in the heart of the community. The problem was they leaked.

For 30 years, the leaks were believed to have been undetected, while people in the community reported ailments they couldn't explain and were unable to cure. The ailments included migraines, rashes, hair loss, miscarriages and even cancer, according to news reports.

In 1989, a fuel spill that saturated the ground was discovered under the school by accident. The building had to be evacuated, then it was condemned and torn down. The same happened to the nursing station and the former government complex.

Dozens of homes were later found to be contaminated by fuel that had seeped deep into the ground.

One environmental study in 2000 found it would cost about \$18 million to clean up the mess.

The settlement is in addition to the cost to remove much of the tainted soil.

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- By Alendra Paul

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