

Alaska Community Action on Toxics

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Mr. Mathy Stanilaus
Assistant Administrator
Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response
EPA West
1301 Constitution Avenue NW, room 3146B
Washington DC 20314-1000

RE: THANK YOU

Dear Mr. Stanilaus:

On behalf of the St. Lawrence Island Delegation and Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT), thank you for meeting with members of our delegation on Thursday September 24, 2009. We appreciated the time that you took with us to discuss the pressing needs of the people of St. Lawrence Island, including the toxic contamination of formerly used defense sites (FUDS), the need for proper site characterization and EPA oversight at Gambell and Northeast Cape FUDs, thorough and aggressive clean up, and the inclusion of Northeast Cape on the National Priorities List. The Yupik people of St. Lawrence Island have disproportionate health problems that may be associated with exposures to chemical contamination from the formerly used defense sites and long-range transport, including cancers, diabetes, reproductive problems, thyroid disease, nervous and immune system disorders, and learning disabilities. Actions are needed to protect the health and well-being of present and future generations, the lands, waters, and traditional subsistence way of life of the Yupik people. Climate warming exacerbates the mobilization and transport of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) from local and distant sources in the Arctic. Synergistic effects of climate warming and increasing levels of contaminants in the Arctic threaten food security and the survival of the Yupik people.

As we discussed, we are concerned about the contamination and environmental health issues associated with the formerly used defense sites on St. Lawrence Island at Northeast Cape and Gambell. The island's military installations and residents served important strategic roles during the Cold War. However, when the bases were shut down, large quantities of hazardous wastes and debris were left behind. At Northeast Cape, massive fuel spills, PCBs, pesticides, heavy metals, asbestos, and solvents were dumped on the surface or buried in unlined landfills that are leaching to the Suqitughneq (Suqi) River and coastal waters. The village at Northeast Cape was displaced after the military contaminated the area and cannot be re-established until effective remedial measures are implemented and finalized.

At Gambell, the wastes, including fuels, solvents, unexploded ordnance, and metal debris were buried in the unconsolidated gravel which forms the foundation of the village. At Gambell, we are concerned about the vulnerability of the shallow (about 10 feet) aquifer that

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serves as the community water source. We are also concerned that the school and residential areas are located on areas overlying military contamination. The toxic waste dumps on St. Lawrence Island have devastated the lands and waters, and have continued to affect the traditional food gathering and health for more than 50 years.

In addition to the military contamination, the Yupik people of St. Lawrence Island are also suffering from the contamination that arrives on wind and ocean currents into our region via long-range transport. As you know, the Arctic has become a hemispheric sink for POPs that travel hundreds and thousands of miles northward on wind and ocean currents, where they accumulate in the bodies of wildlife and people of the north. This contamination harms our traditional foods and the health of our people. Arctic Indigenous peoples carry some of the highest levels of these contaminants in their bodies. The chemicals include legacy chemicals such as PCBs and DDT, as well as currently used industrial chemicals and pesticides such as brominated flame retardants, fluorinated substances, and endosulfan. We ask for your support in preventing the production and release of these chemicals through reform of our federal laws, the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). We also ask for U.S. participation and leadership internationally through the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs). It is only through national and international actions that we can protect the health of the peoples of the Arctic.

U.S. leadership is critical to the success of international efforts to eliminate the world's most dangerous substances. We are eager to work with the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of State, and Congress to enact legislation that reflects the precautionary spirit and scientific rigor of the Stockholm Convention and enable swift action by the U.S. on POPs chemicals. We are committed to ensure ratification of a strong, protective treaty.

The Preamble of the Convention recognizes the special vulnerability of Arctic Indigenous Peoples and states: *"Acknowledging that the Arctic ecosystems and indigenous communities are particularly at risk because of biomagnifications of persistent organic pollutants and that contamination of their traditional foods is a public health issue."* Some Arctic Indigenous populations have shown "levels of contaminants in blood and breast milk [that are] higher than those found anywhere else on the Earth." This recognition inspired the negotiation of the Stockholm Convention, as noted in the preamble, and must now motivate the Convention's strong implementation. This is not an abstract issue for the Yupik people and other Arctic Indigenous peoples—it affects their daily lives and the health of future generations. They depend on traditional foods from the land and sea for their physical, cultural, and spiritual well-being—foods that are contaminated with POPs chemicals. Our own community-based research has found high levels of such POPs chemicals as PCBs and other "legacy" chemicals in the traditional foods and blood serum of the Yupik people. The most recent Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme report also raises concerns about increasing levels of "new" POPs chemicals in the Arctic such as the polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) and perfluorinated substances. With the rapid decline of sea ice, scientists predict greater atmospheric loading of such chemicals as endosulfan into the marine environment. We must take swift national and international actions to eliminate the production and use of

these chemicals that threaten the integrity of ecosystems and public health in the Arctic and around the globe.

The people of St. Lawrence Island need your help to move forward and to renew their way of life. We want to ensure that Northeast Cape is safe and healthy for the restoration of the Suqi River watershed and re-establishment of the village. Our research in the Suqi River watershed indicates the presence of PCBs, pesticides, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons associated with past fuel spills, polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs), and heavy metals. In Gambell, we must also ensure protection of the drinking water source, the school, and residential areas.

We request your support to ensure proper regulatory oversight, enforcement, and funding for characterization and responsible cleanup of the formerly used defense sites. This includes provisions for use of innovative clean-up technologies relevant to the Arctic, accountability to the leadership of the communities of Savoonga and Gambell, government-to-government consultation with Tribes, and citizen participation in remedial decisions. Tribes, as sovereign governments, must have the right to determine clean-up standards and serve as official parties to the Records of Decision. We also request your support to achieve restoration and removal of the contamination rather than premature closures, partial excavations, natural attenuation, and/or land use controls. We request the following actions to address and prevent further health and environmental effects of military contamination on St. Lawrence Island.

Specifically, the matters of primary urgency for your attention and action include:

- Complete removal of the solid and hazardous waste materials at the Northeast Cape Site 7 landfill;
- Removal and treatment of the White Alice site soils and groundwater to effectively remove associated contaminants;
- Removal/remediation of contaminants in the Northeast Cape Main Complex soils and groundwater, as well as on-going monitoring to ensure safe drinking water supplies;
- Effective remediation and long term monitoring of the Suqi River drainage basin sediments and surface water (fuels and PCB contamination);
- Complete removal or destruction of the contaminants identified at the former village site at Northeast Cape;
- Restoration of the Suqi River watershed and shallow groundwater resources within the area of the Main Complex and up-gradient regions of the Main Complex to ensure adequate and safe drinking water at Northeast Cape;
- Removal of contaminant sources at the village in Gambell including those up-gradient from the municipal water supplies and those beneath the residential areas, the school and community buildings;
- Long term, bi-annual monitoring of contaminants of concern within the municipal water supply areas;
- Establishment of a safe drinking water source at Gambell that is up-gradient of the contaminated sites; and
- Institute the tribes as official signatories/Parties to any Records of Decision (RODs).

- Protect the health of children and other vulnerable populations in Alaska and elsewhere through reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) and the federal pesticide law (FIFRA). Include provisions to: 1) phase out persistent, bioaccumulative toxics (PBTs), and chemicals that harm health; 2) require safe substitutes and solutions; 3) give the public and workers the full right-to-know and participate; and 4) require prior, comprehensive safety data for all chemicals.
- Take swift, bold measures to substantially reduce the greenhouse gases to protect communities of the Arctic from climate change impacts.
- U.S. participation and leadership is critical to the success of international efforts to eliminate the world's most dangerous substances that threaten the north/Arctic. Ensure passage of strong, effective implementation legislation for the ratification of the Stockholm Convention, the international, legally-binding treaty on POPs.

Again, we very much appreciate your time in meeting with the delegation. ACAT is a non-profit organization that empowers individuals and tribes throughout Alaska who are seeking assistance with toxic contamination issues that affect the health of people and the environment. We look forward to working with you to address the concerns of the Yupik people of St. Lawrence Island.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us directly or to reach us through our Washington D.C. representative—The Raben Group (contact: Ellie Collinson at (202) 587-4935 or ecollinson@rabengroup.com).

Sincerely,



Vi Waghiyi
Environmental Health and Justice
Program Director



Pamela K. Miller
Executive Director

cc Senator Lisa Murkowski
 Senator Mark Begich