AB gov’t must study oil sands health impact more: U of A students

December 7, 2009

EDMONTON—A University of Alberta student group requests that the Alberta government conduct a baseline health study of northern Alberta communities following an independent report that details the level of toxic chemicals downstream of Athabasca oil sands development.

The study, spearheaded by U of A water scientist Dr. David Schindler, reveals that the toxic chemical levels in the Athabasca River downstream from oil sands development are five times higher than official government estimates.

Due to the study’s December 7 release, the U of A-based group Stand with Fort Chipewyan is calling upon the Alberta government to conduct a more comprehensive follow-up to last February’s Alberta Health Services study.

Avnish Nanda, the group’s President, said that Dr. Schindler’s report has hurt the legitimacy of the government’s position on the issue surrounding the health of residents living in Fort Chipewyan, downstream along the Athabasca River.

The government denies that their health problems are linked to the environment, as well as that the oil sands projects upstream along the Athabasca are affecting the local environment.

“Although it’s irresponsible to jump to conclusions here, the government has a moral responsibility to uncover whether the development practices are indeed contributing to the health problems Fort Chipewyan faces,” he said, adding that that a baseline health study would establish the health of Northern Alberta residents today and allow for changes to be tracked in subsequent years.

This process can then identify whether health problems are increasing, and with other studies, identify what exactly is behind Fort Chipewyan’s situation.

“This has been requested by people in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities alike in northern Alberta,” said Nanda. “Although last February’s AHS study established that Fort Chip’s cancer rates were at abnormally high, the government rejected the need to study what role the environment is playing in contributing to their serious health situation.”

About Stand With Fort Chipewyan

Stand with Fort Chipewyan is a non-partisan, campus advocacy organization located at the University of Alberta that was founded in January 2009. We are dedicated to raising awareness

to concerns expressed by Fort Chipewyan residents, as well as lobbying the Alberta government to firmly establish the Athabasca oil sands' effect on the health of neighbouring communities.

More information about Stand with Fort Chipewyan can be found at http://www.standwithfortchip.com.

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