



# Alaska Native Science Commission

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February 2003

Dear Tribal Leader

For many years people in Indian Country have been concerned about the increase in the number of deaths from various diseases and whether contaminants in the environment are causing the increased number. We have been working with the EPA—OPPTS, Native Communities and Tribes in Alaska, and recently Tribes in the continental United States to try and find the cause of the disease increase in Indian Country.

One of the things we are doing as part of that project is hosting a meeting of Tribal scientists and authorities called “A Subsistence Technical-Planning Meeting, To Protect Traditional-Tribal Life ways.” (See enclosed notes from the San Francisco meeting and Agenda) The meeting is designed to bring together Tribal technical experts and will take place in Anchorage, Alaska, April 12-15. This meeting is not just for Alaska Tribes, we want all Tribes to participate in the meeting. We’ll be sending out more information about the meeting in the near future. Recently, several tribal representatives and staff, EPA staff, NTEC staff and Alaska Native Science Commission staff met in San Francisco to discuss the proposed meeting and develop an agenda. Participants in the meeting were Phil Robinson, EPA, OPPTS, Caren Rothstein-Robinson, EPA, Indian Program Coordinator, Pollution Prevention and Toxics, Roland Shanks, Contractor working for ANSC on this project, Fred Corey, Chair of FOSTTA, Aroostook band of Micmac, Art Ivanoff, member of TPPC, Native Village of Unalakleet, Kesner Flores, Cortina Rancheria, Jean Gamache, EPA, Lisa Gover, NTEC, Lydia Olympic- Vice Chair NTOC and member of Igiuguk Tribal Council, and Barbara Cunningham, OPPTS, Environmental Assistance. At the Anchorage meeting we want to discuss issues, resources, and gaps concerning contaminants and how they affect tribal ways of life.

During the meeting we will talk about the contamination issues affecting Tribes and what resources are available to solve the problems, and then we will try and determine what additional resources are needed to work on these issues. Out of this meeting we also hope to do several things to ensure Tribes have the resources and support they need to address this issue. We hope to effect change within the agency and Tribes to increase their ability to protect Tribe’s life ways and cultures. To accomplish this we want to share stories, information, and traditional knowledge. We anticipate developing a process and structure to enable Tribes to protect their traditional life ways and cultures. Currently EPA calls this issue “Subsistence” but many Tribal leaders have suggested other names. We want to develop a process for understanding, naming, and defining the issue. Some Tribes have suggested that there needs to be a National Tribal Gathering in 2004 to discuss this issue, so if Tribes want to do that, the planning for that gathering needs to start at this meeting. Lastly, but probably most important, we need to improve communications between all the Tribes, agencies, and organizations working on the issue.

To get ready for the meeting we are trying to collect information about how Tribes see the problem of contamination in traditional foods and how that affects Tribal life ways and cultures. We are also trying to gather information about what resources Tribes are currently using to address this issue. To do this we need your help. We need you or someone from your tribe to fill out the attached form and send it back to us. We are going to collect all the information on the forms and write a report that will be presented at the meeting and added to during the meeting.

This report will be better if people are as specific as possible. Instead of an answer like, we are concerned about the high number of cancer deaths, a more specific answer would be, we are concerned about the effects of Dioxin in our water from the paper mill upriver and whether it is causing the high number of cancer deaths. We are also interested in any thing your Tribe is doing to research, identify or solve the problem and problems you are having working on the issue.

We are concerned about the confidentiality of information we collect for this project. To make sure that no information is made public without the permission of the Tribes, we have made a place on the form that you can check to ensure the information is confidential. It is much more important we know what the issues and concerns are, than we know the specific Tribe voicing the concern. This project is designed to try and get an idea of the concerns Tribes have and not to identify the concerns of specific Tribes, so please have someone in the Tribe take a minute to fill out the form and return it to us via E-Mail at [conference@aknsc.org](mailto:conference@aknsc.org) or fax at 907 258 2652, or by mail to Alaska Native Science Commission, 429 L St. Anchorage Alaska 99501. If you have questions please call Roland or Patricia at 907 258 2672.