



Press Release- For Immediate Release

Mikisew Cree First Nation sounds alarm bells following Alberta's largest oil sands' seepage

FORT CHIPEWYAN, TREATY 8 TERRITORY -Mikisew Cree First Nation is calling on government and industry for immediate action in the wake of Alberta's largest - and ongoing - spill at an oil sands project at Imperial Kearn's operation

The remote and northern First Nation is concerned about the drinking water situation. On March 1, 2023, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo has stopped drawing from Lake Athabasca, meaning there is a limited supply of drinking water, and the winter ice road melts in the next couple weeks, limiting the ability to bring in drinking water.

"Getting safe drinking water to our members is the most urgent priority," said Mikisew Chief, Billy-Joe Tuccaro. "Our Nation has been battling increased cancer rates for years. We are calling on Imperial and government to make that happen. We also expect full disclosure of RMWB's findings following their water investigations" he continued, referring to the RMWB Community Notice posted just [March 1, 2023](#).

The drinking water problem is just the tip of the iceberg.

This spill of 5,300,000,000 liters of process-affected water is a minimum estimate of how much oil sands process water has escaped into the environment. The spill is in addition to significant seepage of mine water in the same area. The Nations have learned the seepage has been going on for at least nine months with the only notice coming from the Alberta Energy Regulator in May, 2022 with no further communication until February 7, 2022 (only by way of Environmental Protection Order).

If the seepage is not stopped and cleaned up by the time the snow melts, then there could be significant impacts downstream. Mikisew members remain dependent on the fish and animals to survive and have been using the land, swimming and drinking the water, without any adequate notice from the AER or Imperial.

Alberta and Canada approved this project and all of its associated plans despite known concerns about this particular tailings pond.

Chief Tuccaro said, "This is a failure of the provincial regulator to do its job. The AER and Canada approved Imperial's project knowing the risk of seepage for this tailing pond. There needs to be an independent review of the approval of this tailings pond and the AER's management of this mess. Canada and Alberta need to establish a commission to look at solutions for tailings accumulation. As we all know, there are many more tailings ponds and the risk to our Nation is huge. Meanwhile, Imperial Oil needs to honour the agreement that we entered into prior to this project going ahead".

The AER neglected to notify Mikisew of the severity of the problem for months, preventing the Nation from taking steps to protect its members and limited timely action to protect the fish, medicines and animals that Mikisew members depend on. Mikisew is therefore calling for an immediate and independent review into the Alberta Energy Regulator's oversight of oil sands tailings.

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