



Nishnawbe Aski Nation
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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TRAGIC HOUSE FIRE CLAIMS LIVES IN PIKANGIKUM FIRST NATION

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler, on behalf of the Executive Council, expressed heartfelt condolences following a tragic house fire last night that has claimed at least six lives in Pikangikum First Nation.

“We are shocked by this tragedy and our prayers are with the victims, their families and the entire community as they struggle to come to grips with this devastating loss,” said Grand Chief Alvin Fiddler. “The community is still in shock, but we have assured Chief and Council that we will do everything possible to ensure that all required services and supports are made available.”

Ontario Provincial Police officials and the Office of the Fire Marshall are investigating the cause of a residential fire on Tuesday evening at approximately 11:45 p.m. OPP have confirmed multiple fatalities, with several people still unaccounted for.

The chronic lack of firefighting services and substandard housing in NAN First Nations is a deadly combination that has claimed far too many lives. There are no firefighting services in Pikangikum and 95 per cent of homes do not even have running water.

“Our communities are overwhelmed with suicide at an epidemic level, a NAN-wide health crisis and several states of emergency. These fire-related fatalities are stretching their limited resources to the breaking point,” said Fiddler. “People are dying from overcrowding, unsafe building standards and a lack of basic firefighting equipment, and more lives are at risk. Such tragedies are avoidable, and it is critical that our communities are resourced appropriately to address their needs to ensure their health and safety.”

Fatal house fires are all-too common in NAN First Nations:

- A fire in Nibinamik First Nation claimed the lives of two young boys (aged 2 & 3) and injured a third child in 2011.

- A fire in Wunnumin Lake First Nation in 2013 year claimed the lives of two children, aged six and one, and their 21-year old aunt.
- A mother, her two young daughters and her nephew perished in Mishkeegogamang First Nation in 2014 after a fire broke out in the family home in the early morning.

House fires are especially devastating in remote communities where overcrowding is the norm and entire families are left homeless every time a home is lost. A 2008 fire in Kashechewan First Nation left a family of 11 homeless after destroying the home of the late NAN Elder George Wesley, the father of Ricardo Wesley, who died in a 2006 fire with Jamie Goodwin. An inquest into their death, the Kashechewan Inquest, garnered national attention on the inadequacies of community safety and firefighting resources in remote First Nations.

A federal study on fire safety on reserves in 2010 found that people living on First Nation reserves are 10 times more likely to die in a house fire than people in the rest of Canada.

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