



Nishnawbe Aski Nation

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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INAC'S FAILURE TO TRACK FIRE STATS ON-RESERVE SHOWS CALLOUS DISREGARD FOR SAFETY

THUNDER BAY, ON: Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum says a report today that the Government of Canada no longer tracks fires that have claimed hundreds of lives in First Nations because they were a 'burden' to communities shows a callous disregard for the health and safety of Indigenous Peoples.

"The apparent excuse by federal officials that the government didn't want to 'burden' First Nation reserves with having to report statistics is ludicrous and insulting to the families and memory of all these we have lost due to tragic house fires, especially the helpless children who have died in their sleep," said Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum. "How can the federal government implement current strategies and plans without those baseline statistics?"

According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Conservative MP John Brassard received a response from Indigenous and North Affairs Canada that: *'In 2010, a decision was taken to stop collecting data of fire incidents on reserve in order to reduce the reporting burden on First Nations.'* Brassard, a former firefighter, was inquiring about the tragic fire that claimed nine lives in Pikangikum First Nation in the spring.

Three generations of one family were lost in the Pikangikum fire on March 29, 2016. In response to this, NAN launched Amber's Fire Safety Campaign to increase fire safety and help prevent tragic house fires that continue to claim lives in NAN First Nations, especially remote communities.

The campaign is named in honour of Amber Strang, an infant just five months old and the youngest victim of the March 29 fire in Pikangikum.

The main goal of the campaign is to provide every home in NAN territory a smoke detector within one year.

Long-term goals of the campaign include:

- providing residential fire extinguishers to homes in all NAN First Nations;
- increasing fire safety awareness and education, including support for certification in wood burning systems and fire prevention services; and

- a comprehensive plan for fire protection including fire-fighting equipment, services and infrastructure including water distribution systems and fire hydrants.

Fatal house fires are all-too common in NAN First Nations and the chronic lack of firefighting services and substandard housing is a deadly combination. 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.

Mishkeegamang First Nation has lost 30 members to house fires in the past 35 years.

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 2007 study by Canada Mortgage Housing Corporation Fire Prevention in Aboriginal Communities found that people living in First Nations are 10 times more likely to die in a house fire than people in the rest of Canada.