

Food Security and Human Rights in Small Island Developing States and the Arctic

MSV

Patricia Cochran

www.nativescience.org

National Tribal Subsistence Workshop

50 tribal representatives



Purposes

- 1. Identify issues and concerns regarding contaminants in Traditional Foods
- 2. Discuss issues, resources, and gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways
- 3. Share stories, information, and knowledge to develop the process and structure to protect traditional ways of life

1. Identify issues and concerns regarding contaminants in Traditional Foods - Summary



- PCB levels in fish
- Oil & Gas development
- Mining activity
- Pulp mills
- Superfund sites
- Sewage discharge
- Air pollution
- Herbicides & Pesticides
- Long term exposure
- Replacement foods

Issues & Concerns (cont.)



- Is the food safe to eat
- What is a “safe level”
- Reliability of risk assessments
- Effect on culture and traditional lifeways
- Inability to control contaminants & future
- Tribal rights and jurisdiction

2. Discuss issues, resources, gaps regarding contaminants and how they affect tribal ways



“In 1987, I went to Pt. Hope. The people there lost everything up there due to toxins seeping into the earth from tanks rotting. Now they are having problems in St. Lawrence Island, too. I just came from the toxin conference in Fairbanks. Maybe it’s too late to clean up, I don’t know. All we have to do today is teach our younger people that are going to be Elders too, teach them - tell stories to each other. Gather your Elders and let them tell you about life. Respect. Because you notice everyone notices; greed always gives problems. You have to learn to understand yourself first and then share. That’s what our Elders used to tell us, all of us, everyone knows that, but do something about it.”

Rita Blumenstein, Elder, Alaska.

Sites & Specific Contaminants



“My community has had environmental contamination problems since at least the 1970s. The St. Lawrence Seaway opened in the late ‘50s followed by the Sanders Moses Power Dam which brought cheap hydroelectric power and three to four industries settled in the area. Since then we have had several sources of environmental contamination. Three sites have superfund issues. My community mobilized in the mid-‘70s to start remediation of the problem.”

Doris Cook, Elder, Akwesasne.

- Contaminated grounds and leaching from old military sites
- Fuel dumps, hazardous waste from plane crashes
- 50’s & 60’s radar bases on reservations
- Storage tanks leakage
- Superfund sites
- Power dams and hydro-power industries
- Paper and pulp mills
- Logging
- Uranium mines and water contamination

Sites (cont.)



“Today we are trying to deal with impacts to the land because of the policies along the Mexican border. As the customs and border patrol clamp down on the major avenues of traffic along the border, it is forcing more and more people across our land. We have two million acres. Sixty-five miles of our southern boundary is shared with Mexico. We have a problem with the people and substances coming across that land. You have more and more vehicles whether it's the smugglers or government agents tearing up that land.”

Angelo Joaquin, Elder, Tohono O'odham Nation.

- Boundary connection to Mexico
- Open dumps
- Abandoned mines
- Bombing ranges
- Cruise ships
- Drilling rigs and muds
- Old communication cables
- WWII dumping sites
- Exxon Valdez oil spill
- Radioactive contaminants

Animals, Fish, Plants



“There are numerous ways Basketweavers and their families may be exposed to herbicides in plant materials that have been sprayed. Weavers may be exposed during gathering, processing or weaving. Baskets may be used for cooking, for acorns, for baby rattles and baby baskets, and for ceremonial use.” *Vivian Parker, California Indian Basketweavers Association.*

- Seal & seal oil
- Plants & berries
- Moose liver
- Species decline – diversity, quality, quantity
- Drought
- Endocrine disruptors
- Plant roots
- Discolored plants
- Basket weaver grasses
- Mercury in fish

Other Concerns



- Regulation - Is there such a thing as an “acceptable level” of contaminants?
- Monitoring of pharmaceutical traces
- Critical habitat
- Conflict avoidance agreements

“Some of us, like myself, believe that development is going to happen. There’s not a lot we can do to stop it, but there are things we can do. On the North Slope, the North Slope Borough and oil companies have developed a conflict avoidance agreement for exploration in the Arctic Ocean to avoid whaling conflict and habitat conflict as ships and drilling moves. When oil companies come in and say, “we want to develop this area” they have to understand it’s a critical habitat. They impact the tax base for the North Slope Borough, so what we do to try to counteract that is to say, “if you ever impact our ecosystem off the shore here you will pay.” It’s an understanding with the developers.” *Rex Snyder, Alaska Native Harbor Seal Commission.*

Spiritual & Traditional Practices

- Respect plants & earth
- Bring Native tradition to science
- Use traditional knowledge wisely
- Patience in teaching our children
- Health of the people depends on health of the culture
- We are only as healthy as Mother Earth
- Maintain oral tradition in teaching children
- Religion changed who we are
- Sanctity of ceremonies are compromised by contaminated elements
- Circle of life includes all plants, fish, animals, insects, humans

3. Share Stories, information and knowledge



"I mentioned the sacred circle of life. If you can imagine a circle, in that circle are the people, plants, animals, birds, fish, and insects. The Native belief is that if you damage anything within that sacred circle of life, eventually you damage yourself. If you take any one of those items, animals, out of the sacred circle of life--everything would die. If you take out the insects, eventually everything will die. If you take out the plants, eventually everything will die. If you take out the fish, eventually everything will die. What would happen if you take the humans out of the sacred circle of life? What would happen then? Nothing. We are the least important in that sacred circle of life. The ancient beliefs are that we were the last to come along. The animals, plants, fish, birds and insects didn't depend on us. Our lives depend on a harmonious relationship with everything within the sacred circle of life. That's the basis of Native spirituality. It's not a worship of animals. It is a relationship, a strong feeling with the natural world."

Butch Phillips, Penobscot Indian Nation.

Recommendations

- Use “customary & traditional use” instead of subsistence
- Remember the 7th generation in assessment of environmental impacts
- Develop seed banks as a tangible connection to our ancestors
- Litigate regarding Clean Water Act
- Tribal commitments to communities and to educate agencies
- Continue Indian General Assistance Program
- Priority list for Native lands for superfund sites
- Incorporating TK into hazarding ranking

Recommendations (cont.)

- Use precautionary principle – to err on side of caution
- EPA funds could be more like 638 funds
- Include smaller tribes
- Rewrite Indian histories
- Toxic cleanup of air quality
- Use environmental enforcement officers
- Train our own as scientists, samplers
- Standardize QAPPs
- Establish “Native American Traditional and Wild Food Security Act” in Congress
- Establish national database to track contaminants

Learning the Yupik Caribou Dance

