



Toxic Park Conundrum

This Toxic Site is Adjacent to Lesser Slave Lake

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When respected Métis Elder Alenda Schafer moved to Faust in the 1970's she wasn't told there was a toxic site right next door to her property. That's because no one knew how toxic it was until tests were performed in the 1980's. Alenda and her children regularly went 'next door' to play on the (toxic) sawdust piles. Her husband didn't exactly keep to the property line when building their property, resulting today that, although there is a dioxin hotspot right on her lilac bush in Alenda's front lawn, there is no contamination 'on residential property', as far as Alberta Environment is concerned.

The "Osrose site" is where telephone poles and other wood were treated with arsenic and pentachlorophenol (PCP) as preservatives. The worst part of this operation, which exploded and caught fire in 1969, was that they burned all of their waste chemicals, creating a toxic dioxin soup on various portions of the site. During the explosion, "45 gallon drums were blown so high that they looked like dimes in the sky, then it rained green", say eye witness reports.

After tests were performed in 1989, a clean-up was undertaken for arsenic and PCP, which Alenda's son participated in. At that time they took out many tons of contaminated soil until they reached a bunch of 'green goop' and the engineer said to "bury it". No-one realized how bad the dioxin contamination was until further tests in 1995. In 1996, a fence was placed around the property that was later expanded in 2013, as quad riders have continued to spread contamination outside of this originally contaminated area directly adjacent to the Lesser Slave Lake. We are aware of many hotspots on and outside the site, as well as a groundwater arsenic plume next to the Lake.

Although warnings have been given in many engineering reports over the decades about the Old Man Creek flooding right next to the Osrose site, this continues to be a problem. Every year, Alenda and her friends contact Alberta Environment and Big Lakes County when the creek overflows. Every year, there is a lack of response, and water drains over the contaminated site and onto Alenda's basement. Every day quad riders continue to drive past this site to access the lake, spreading contamination further. A 2015 report tested a single surface water sample in the Lesser Slave Lake directly NW of the Osrose site. It shows dioxin and arsenic above Canadian guidelines for the protection of aquatic life. Local people want further testing for dioxin, PCP and arsenic near the Faust water intake, which is in this same area.

Currently, Big Lakes County is negotiating with Alberta Environment (owners of the site) to turn the Osrose site into a park! With raised walkways and interpretive signs asking visitors to stay on the walkways and not expose themselves to contamination, could this be a new type of tourism? It's less dangerous than Chernobyl, but perhaps the extra fear factor is of interest to tourists? Elder Alenda Schafer asks that Alberta Environment "Clean it up, and build me a new house with no basement". **A Public meeting on this topic will be held in Faust, July 11, 2017 at the Royal Purple Hall at 6 pm.** Representatives of Big Lakes County and Alberta Environment and Parks will be present.

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