



Manitoba
Keewatinowi
Okimakanak Inc.

For immediate release
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First Nations Demand Aggressive Action from Manitoba Hydro: Uncontrolled COVID-19 Outbreak Detected at Keeyask Construction Site

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement along with the four Cree Nations that are in a partnership with Manitoba Hydro in the construction and operation of the Keeyask Generating Station in Northern Manitoba. The four First Nations are: Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Fox Lake Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation, and York Factory Cree Nation.

On October 22, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed at the Keeyask site. Since then, an unspecified number of COVID-19 tests have been done on staff. Yesterday, First Nations leaders learned that additional positive cases have been confirmed and many more cases are presumed positives. Almost 10% of the workforce is now in isolation.

MKO and the four First Nations are demanding that the Province of Manitoba immediately declare the Keeyask construction site as **code red** under the province's pandemic response system. The First Nations are asking the province to take aggressive action to bring the epidemic under control. MKO and the First Nations are extremely concerned about the lack of information Manitoba Hydro has provided on the spread of this virus. People from the four First Nations work at Keeyask and fear that people may have unknowingly brought COVID-19 back to their home communities before the first case of COVID-19 was detected on October 22. Manitoba Hydro cannot confirm on what date the virus may have appeared on site. The First Nations are working closely with public health officials to determine next steps.

Since the pandemic began in March 2020, MKO First Nations have expressed concerns about Manitoba Hydro's plans for the Keeyask construction site. Manitoba Hydro has more than 750 employees at Keeyask who come and go from the site on rotating shifts—most employees have 21 days on and 7 days off. Manitoba Hydro has staff working at the site from various parts of Canada, including a current COVID-19 hotspot—Winnipeg.

MKO and the First Nations plan to meet with Manitoba Hydro again on Monday, November 2, to discuss next steps for the Keeyask site.

QUOTES:

“Corporate interests will never trump the safety of First Nations peoples,” shared **MKO Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “I commend the First Nations leaders who have worked diligently to try to protect our people. The provincial government must take aggressive action at the Keeyask construction site as there is an uncontrolled epidemic taking place. This site is not providing any hydro-electric power

at this point, it is not an essential operation. MKO asserts that Manitoba Hydro and the Government of Manitoba need to put people before profits.”

“Today we met with the CEO of Manitoba Hydro, as partners in the Keeyask project, and demanded that they consider the well-being of our communities and province while responding to the COVID outbreak at the Keeyask construction site. Specifically, we asked them to confirm that no one would enter or leave the site, while the outbreak was ongoing. Once again, we are now placed in a situation where we must take action to show this corporation and the province that we are serious—this site cannot continue to operate ‘business as usual.’ We are urging the Province of Manitoba to put into place orders preventing people from entering or leaving this site until this outbreak is declared over. First Nations have undertaken many actions to restrict the transmission of COVID-19 and we are urging the province to do the same,” stated **Chief Doreen Spence** of the **Tataskweyak Cree Nation**.

“Manitoba Hydro must listen to the reasonable demands of the First Nations that are partners in the Keeyask project,” stated **Chief Betsy Kennedy** of **War Lake First Nation**. “We are making these demands to protect our communities and all people in Manitoba. We are asking Manitoba Hydro to use aggressive tactics to slow the spread of COVID-19. We will continue to meet with them in good faith. First Nations will not back down and will continue to do everything in our power to keep our people safe.”

“Once again, we are extremely frustrated,” said **Chief Leroy Constant** of **York Factory First Nation**. “We have implored our partners at Manitoba Hydro to respond to our concerns and now we must escalate our concerns. We urge the Province of Manitoba to step in and take aggressive action on the uncontrolled epidemic taking place at Keeyask. We all know COVID-19 is a growing issue for Manitoba and our health care system is on the verge of a crisis where doctors will need to determine who gets access to a ventilator. The system cannot deal with more people needing access to intensive care beds. We need to see action on this issue today, otherwise we will be taking action as sovereign First Nations.”

“We called on the CEO of Manitoba Hydro in good faith to do the right thing and take aggressive action at Keeyask,” shared **Chief Morris Beardy** of the **Fox Lake Cree Nation**. “Manitoba Hydro cannot continue to ignore the concerns expressed by First Nations. As we are in a partnership, we implore the Manitoba Government to show leadership and direct Manitoba Hydro to take the most aggressive actions possible. Manitoba residents are fully aware of the growing cases of COVID-19 in the province. With the lack of health care resources in the North and with the lack of available ICU beds, we must do everything we can to stop the spread of this deadly virus. We are doing our utmost to protect the people in our communities.”

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Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak Inc. (MKO) is a non-profit, political advocacy organization that has represented 26 First Nation communities in Manitoba’s North since 1981. The MKO represents more than 72,000 First Nations people.