



Manitoba
Keewatinowi
Okimakanak Inc.

For immediate release
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First Nations Urge Province of Manitoba to Immediately Declare Keeyask Construction Site as Having an Uncontrolled COVID-19 Outbreak

Treaty Five Territory, Thompson, MB – Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Inc. is issuing this statement following a meeting with Manitoba Hydro’s CEO about the outbreak of COVID-19 at the Keeyask Generating Station in Northern Manitoba. Four MKO First Nations are partners in this project: Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Fox Lake Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation, and York Factory Cree Nation.

MKO and the First Nations met with Manitoba Hydro’s CEO, Manitoba Hydro staff, as well as public health officials this afternoon. The First Nations were seeking details on next steps and a clear plan on how the uncontrolled outbreak of COVID-19 would be contained for the Keeyask construction site. They were also seeking information on the exact number of workers who have left the Keeyask site since October 20, 2020.

“Our meeting with Manitoba Hydro today was extremely disappointing. It is clear that this corporation has no plan to address the uncontrolled COVID-19 outbreak at the Keeyask construction site in Northern Manitoba,” shared **Grand Chief Garrison Settee**. “We are dismayed to hear the CEO state that there is no plan in place. We now call on the Premier of Manitoba as well as the Minister of Health to meet with our First Nations leaders immediately. The province must recognize and declare that there is an uncontrolled outbreak of COVID-19 at Keeyask. Failing to address this situation in an urgent manner will have dire consequences for the entire province. Action is needed immediately to protect the health of all Manitoba residents.”

On October 22, 2020, the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed at the Keeyask site. First Nations leaders learned of 31 positive cases on November 1, 2020. Contract tracing has been completed for these 31 cases and 129 contacts were identified via this process. More than 100 people are now in isolation. MKO is aware that at least two people who tested positive for COVID-19 left the Keeyask construction site. Contract tracing has identified that the virus has moved to at least two more health regions besides the Northern health region.

“During our meeting we raised our ongoing concerns with communication. We have not received any pandemic plan from Manitoba Hydro despite asking for one,” shared Grand Chief Settee. “We are concerned about the communication being shared with people working at the Keeyask construction site. We have asked Manitoba Hydro to provide clearer, more timely communication to everyone in an effort to make it clear that there is an uncontrolled COVID-19 outbreak at Keeyask. We all must take this situation very seriously.”

“All First Nations in Manitoba have worked extremely hard over the past six months to keep COVID-19 out of our communities,” said **Dr. Barry Lavallee**, medical expert and Chief Executive Officer of the health entity Keewatinohk Inniniw Minoyawin. “To help ensure the safety of all Manitoba residents, we are urging the province to take aggressive action to bring this epidemic under control. The health of people living across the province depends on swift action to address this uncontrolled outbreak of COVID-19.”

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 will continue to work closely with the First Nations and will provide information on the COVID-19 outbreak at Keeyask as information becomes available.

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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.