

ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM



Image 1

Environmental racism is an intended consequence of development and resource extraction. It is the result of deliberate decisions that create “sacrifice zones” that mainly affect marginalized groups and are largely out of sight and out of mind from the general public.



EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM IN CANADA

AFRICVILLE, NS

Africville was a primarily black community located on the outskirts of Halifax. Despite paying taxes, the city refused to provide sewage infrastructure, access to clean water, or waste disposal. The site was also the location of a prison, a dump and an infectious disease hospital. In 1960, the citizens were relocated and the community was destroyed for industry development.



Image 2



Image 3

ROOSTER TOWN, MB

Where Winnipeg's Grant Park Mall now sits, was once Rooster Town, home to a Métis community. The City and media reported false stories rooted in racist stereotypes that were harmful and humiliating to the community in order to go ahead with suburban development plans. In 1960, the last few houses were bulldozed and destroyed. Activists have continued protests to protect the remaining natural habitat.

NORTH END WINNIPEG, MB

Winnipeg's North End has experienced environmental racism since 1896 when Eastern European immigrants settled in the area to work in the rail yards and other industries. Cut off from the rest of the city by the vast CPR rail yards, the North End had its own thriving culture despite experiencing much racism and poor living conditions, with few connected to the water supply. Presently, Indigenous residents are faced with poverty, poor housing, and food deserts.



Image 4



Image 5

“I know for a fact that the muskrats and the beavers all have lumps in them now. And I know that the fish, the livers are really mushy. They are no longer edible. I have seen birth defects in birds and the cormorants aren’t growing their wings anymore. I have seen, early spring I have seen the whole south end of the Halfway Lake full of dead fish, so...I have seen lots, lots.” (Kenneth Witowicz, Wabowden, 2022)

WABOWDEN, MB

Wabowden is a largely Métis community, located near an idle nickel mine owned by CaNickel Mining Limited that in 2022 pleaded guilty and was fined for releasing higher-than-allowed amounts of the radioactive element radium-226 into adjacent Bucko Lake. This was the second time in less than six years that CaNickel Mining Limited has been fined under the Fisheries Act for violations related to the mine. Residents have expressed concerns about the abandoned mine and the frequent flooding of the tailings pond, especially as it relates to their health and the surrounding environment. Still, the company has not released data that might assuage such concerns.



Image 6

FORT CHIPEWYAN, AB

Fort Chipewyan is located 300 km north of Imperial Oil’s Kearl Mine and facility along the Athabasca River. Many of the residents of Fort Chip are Mikisew Cree, Athabasca Chipewyan, and Fort Chipewyan Métis. A 2006 health study showed that people in Fort Chipewyan have elevated prevalence rates of diabetes, hypertension, renal failure, and lupus. These are all diseases that have been linked with one or more of the toxins commonly found in tailings pond water. Imperial Oil and the Alberta Energy Regulator were aware of the leaks from the tailings ponds and that they had been leaking into the groundwater for years, but they never informed the community.



Image 7

GRASSY NARROWS FIRST NATION (ASUBPEESCHOSEEWAGONG), ON

Grassy Narrows First Nation is an Ojibway First Nation in North Western Ontario that has been faced with devastating health impacts from mercury poisoning that began in the 1960s when a pulp and paper mill in Dryden, Ontario dumped 9,000 kg of mercury into the English-Wabigoon River system causing many adverse and serious health impacts from mercury poisoning.



Image 8

NORWAY HOUSE CREE NATION (KINOSAO SIPI), MB

Norway House Cree Nation (NHCN) has been experiencing impacts related to hydropower since the 1970s. In 2022, erosion at the 2-Mile Channel intensified and increased at an unprecedented rate due to a high-water event. When Chief Larson Anderson reached out to Manitoba Hydro and the Province of Manitoba requesting meetings and explaining the problem, he was met with silence and eventually, “It’s not our problem.” NHCN has brought in engineers to evaluate the problem and come up with a solution. They are requesting that Manitoba Hydro take responsibility for unforeseen erosion and come up with an engineered solution in real time to prevent future damage. At present, nothing has been done.



Image 9

“I witnessed erosion year in, year out right from on the Lake Winnipeg side, right into Playgreen [Lake] side. We’ve noticed a small island forming with the silt and sand coming in from Lake Winnipeg. It’s approximately half a kilometer east from Panagis Point. But what the erosion has drastically done to our fishery is...our fishery has been decimated. This erosion has drastically damaged the well-being of our people.” (Chris Clark, President, Norway House Cree Nation Fishermen Co-op, 2023)



Image 10

CHEMICAL VALLEY IN SARNIA, ON

In Canada's "Chemical Valley," the Chippewa people of Aamjiwnaang First Nation in Ontario are surrounded by over 50 industrial plants within a 25 km radius of its territory. In 2016, this area was the source of approximately 10% of Ontario's total pollution output. Aamjiwnaang people are disproportionately exposed to sulphur dioxide, particulate matter, benzene, and mercury, among other toxic substances.



Image 11



Image 12

HOLLOW WATER FIRST NATION (WAANIBIIGAAW), MB

Located on the east side of Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba, Hollow Water First Nation is an Anishinaabe (Ojibwa) community. Hollow Water is the proposed site for a silica sand mine. Residents in the community are concerned about the mine's disregard for the spiritual significance of silica sand among the Anishinaabe and its potential effects on air quality, wildlife and water.

SWAN LAKE FIRST NATION, MB

Swan Lake First Nation is a Saulteaux band in Manitoba predominately affected by intensive agriculture. The community's lake is considered to be "dead" and is no longer a viable food source or recreational area for residents due to agricultural run-off. Fragmentation has also contributed to a decline in muskrats, waterfowl, deer, and moose, and community members are reluctant to use medicines from the area because of concerns about exposure to glyphosate (Round Up). Thus, community members are forced to travel elsewhere to practice traditional activities, displacing some from their lands. Another concern is the Line 3 Pipeline that crosses through the community and an unreported oil spill immediately adjacent to the main reserve.



Image 13



Image 14

“When I grew up the shoreline was my school. Indigenous youth can’t do that today. Their schools have been dismantled. Their ability to be Indigenous has been taken away. Manitoba Hydro has replaced residential schools in northern Manitoba.” (Leslie Dysart, O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, 2023)

O-PIPON-NA-PIWIN CREE NATION (OPCN), SOUTH INDIAN LAKE, MB

Located 130km north of Thompson, MB, South Indian Lake (OPCN) has been adversely affected by the Churchill River Diversion and Augmented Flow Program. The program caused flooding in the community and the surrounding traditional lands, destroying their freshwater fishery and traditional livelihoods and ultimately forcing the community to relocate in 1976. In 2013 Manitoba Hydro walked away from discussions with the community and has not returned and has not taken responsibility for the damage they have caused to the land and the community. Manitoba Hydro’s complete lack of disregard for OPCN is in stark contrast to its recent responses to residents of Winnipeg. Manitoba Hydro agreed to compensate the City of Winnipeg for stump removal and replanting trees in Omand Park after complaints of habitat loss and elevated noise levels were raised by the adjacent middle-class neighbourhood of Wolesely.



Image 15

MATHIAS COLOMB CREE NATION (PUKATAWAGAN), MB

Mathias Colomb Cree Nation (MCCN) is situated 850km northwest of Winnipeg. In the 1950s Manitoba Hydro set up a diesel fuel generating station to heat the community's nursing station, school and convent for missionaries. The diesel tanks set up above ground with pipes underground leaked undetected for approximately 30 years. People in the community reported inexplicable ailments including migraines, rashes, hair loss, skin diseases, heart problems, miscarriages and cancers. The school and nearby buildings were demolished in 1989, after the accidental discovery of an unreported oil spill. Mile 99, an encampment located 10km from the reserve, is where the train stopped. CN transported fuel in tanks into the community by fuel trucks. During transportation, diesel oil was regularly spilled, leaching into the soil and seeping into an adjacent creek and the lake, which was the main source of drinking water for the community.



Image 16



Image 17

“In our community there has been an increase in cancers and many have died. A lot of young people in their 40s and 50s, including Elders who lived by the train tracks where the diesel oil was delivered, and by negligence, spilled.” (Donna Dumas, Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, 2023)

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Hollow Water First Nation (Waanibiigaaw), Manitoba:
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South Indian Lake (OPCN), Manitoba: <https://tinyurl.com/3t3e3pad>

Mathias Colomb Cree Nation (Pukatawagan), Manitoba: Donna Dumas, 2023 - Personal account

IMAGES

Image 1: Toxic Tour walkers march under Chemical Valley's smokestacks in Sarnia on Sept. 5, 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2015/09/07/news/first-nations-lead-protest-against-pollution-ontarios-chemical-valley>.

Image 2: Water well used by the residents of Africville. Photo from the Nova Scotia Archives. Photo by Bob Brooks. Retrieved from <https://humanrights.ca/story/story-africville>.

Image 3: A Métis Nation flag in front of the mulcher, which was prevented from clearcutting the remainder of the Parker Wetlands forest by the Rooster Town Blockade. It was eventually released back to its owner. Photo by James Wilt. Retrieved from: <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/chilling-public-protest-rooster-town-slapp>.

Image 4: Anti-poverty protesters march in downtown Winnipeg in 2018. Photo from Andrew Tod, Manitoba Federation of Labour. Retrieved from: <https://news.umanitoba.ca/federal-budget-2021-more-is-needed-to-break-the-poverty-cycle/>

Image 5: Photo of Kenneth Woitowicz.

Image 6: Indigenous communities protesting against mining operations on their territories that are being done without their consent. Retrieved from: <https://thestarfish.ca/journal/2021/10/canadian-organizations-combating-environmental-racism>.

Image 7: Protesting against the tar sands in Alberta. Retrieved from: <https://priceofoil.org/2014/07/07/evidence-tar-sands-linked-cancer/>

Image 8: Sign indicating the high levels of mercury in the English River Wabigoon System. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/grassy-narrows-framework-1.5520501>

Image 9: Image from the video “Erosion Unleashed: The Tragic Consequences of Hydroelectric Development on Indigenous Communities” showing shore erosion on Lake Winnipeg caused by the Eight and Two Model channels. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watchv=gj0cFT5i4R4&t=140s&ab_channel=WaNiSkaTanAlliance

Image 10: Chris Clark on his fishing boat. Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/first-nations-fishermen-manitoba-relief-1.5570593>

Image 11: Residents of Aamjiwnaag standing in front of the resource center sign located next to industrial facilities. Retrieved from: <https://ecojustice.ca/file/defending-the-rights-of-chemical-valley-residents-charter-challenge/>.

Image 12: Protestors at the Manitoba Legislative Building who delivered mock eviction notices to demonstrate the lack of support the mine has from the community. Retrieved from: <https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/first-nation-land-defender-camp-at-hollow-water-first-nation-upset-at-approval-of-silica-mine/>

Image 13: Photo taken from a video made by Kis Kin Ha Ma Ki Win showing agriculture surrounding the water. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watchv=XHJoM6aQE4s&t=8s&ab_channel=KisKinHaMaKiWin

Image 14: Les Dysart of O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation in northern Manitoba. Photo by Will Braun. Retrieved from: <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/evangelical-path-truth-and-reconciliation>

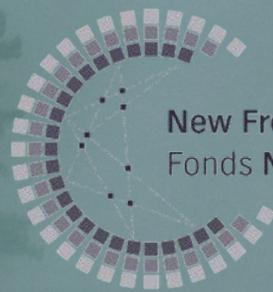
Image 15: A billboard in Conservation Minister Sarah Guillemard's Fort Richmond riding calls on her to say no to Manitoba Hydro's request for a permanent licence for its Augmented Flow Program, which allows the crown corporation to flood South Indian Lake. (John Einarson/CBC). Retrieved from: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/manitoba-hydro-churchill-river-billboard-campaign-1.6009839>

Image 16: Photo depicting the cleanup efforts in Pukatawagan/ Nickel Belt. Photo from Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs. Retrieved from: <https://www.thompsoncitizen.net/nickel-belt-news/mathias-colomb-cree-nation-offered-17-million-settlement-4276658>.

Image 17: Photo of Donna Dumas at the Mile 99 encampment outside Pukatawagan in 2023.



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