

IN DEPTH

Aboriginal Canadians**Kashechewan: Water crisis in Northern Ontario**

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[CBC News](#)

Kashechewan is a Cree First Nations community of about 1,900 people, 10 kilometres upstream from James Bay on the Albany River in Northern Ontario. The closest urban centre to the isolated town is Timmins, Ont., 400 kilometres to the south.

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The community lies on the flood plain of the Albany and many of its buildings are susceptible to flooding in the springtime. There were two major evacuations in 2005 as a result of floods. Alan Pope, a special adviser to the federal Indian affairs minister recommended in November 2006 that the community be relocated to the outskirts of Timmins. The report suggests a number of other options, including moving the reserve to higher ground about 30 kilometres away or keeping the reserve in the same place. Alan Pope said his report could have implications for other remote reserves.



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A new water treatment plant was built in 1995 to replace the old one that had deteriorated beyond repair. But some in the reserve say the new plant was built too small and couldn't handle the expansion the community underwent. Also, the intake pipe for the new treatment plant was placed downstream from the community's sewage lagoon, and tides from James Bay push the dirty water back and forth across the intake.

In October 2005, high E. coli levels were found in the reserve's drinking water and chlorine levels had to be increased to "shock" levels. This led to a worsening of common skin problems, such as scabies and impetigo. A quarter of the community's residents were airlifted to the Northern Ontario communities of Timmins, Sudbury and Cochrane. Another 250 were flown to Ottawa. The evacuation is estimated to have cost \$16 million.

Canadian Forces sent a water purification unit to the reserve, the same equipment it uses on its DART missions to disaster zones such as Kashmir and Sri Lanka.

Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty pledged that the evacuees wouldn't return to Kashechewan until they are healthy and their home has a reliable source of clean water. He didn't say how long he thought it would take.

But Kashechewan is hardly unique among native communities for having substandard water. Nearly 100 reserves across Canada have boil-water advisories and one, the Kwicksutaineuk First Nation on an island off the B.C. coast, has had one in effect for nine years.



Josephine Wesley: "Half the people in the community are infected with skin rashes, all different kinds."