ATSDR’s Perspective

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Partnership with Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

Addressing Tribal Health Concerns in a Customary and Traditional Use Area
Partnership with Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

• 271 of the 566 federally-recognized tribes located in ATSDR Region 10
• Alaska Natives
  • Culturally diverse
  • 19% of the state’s population
• Customary and traditional use of land for subsistence hunting, fishing and gathering
• Widespread concern over contaminants in subsistence foods
  • Mines
  • Former/active military sites
  • Global sources
Partnership with Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

Communication across cultures is approximate and imperfect and where there is a miscommunication it is always the non-dominant culture that suffers the consequences.

Reverend Dr. Michael James Oleska
How ATSDR Supports Tribes

ENGAGE
Engage with tribes to understand their concerns and needs.

TECHNICAL AND EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT
Provide support to help tribes understand if a health impact is associated with chemical contamination in the environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Make recommendations to protect the health of the tribe.
An Approach to Working with Tribes Implemented by ATSDR Region 10

- Establishes a starting point in working with others to build capacity
- Acknowledges the concept of time is relative to a tribes’ cultural existence
- Builds a foundation of diplomacy between governments and people
- Opens the door to respecting the ways of others

Extend Trust
Demonstrate Deference
Offer Patience
Exercise Flexibility

Engaging the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

- Started with conversation at a conference
- Petition letter to ATSDR to look at shellfish dioxin data
- Engaged tribal council members and residents to hear health concerns
- Identified and evaluated available data to address health concerns
- Communicated findings and welcomed questions
- Empowered tribe to transform information into action

Figure. Kaetzel R. (2015)
Implementing the Approach with the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe

- Listened to tribal members in multiple forums in Yakutat to hear concerns expressed about contaminants and health.
- Acknowledged what was heard (captured language and emotion expressed) in a document for the tribe’s review and approval.
- Acted to directly address people’s fear about the contaminant of concern (dioxin) and the disease outcome people related to exposure (cancer).
- Supported the Tribe in decisions to maintain food security (shellfish in Ankau Saltchucks) and ensure cultural integrity (Yakutat Tlingit Tribe culture camp).
Respected people’s fears and nimbly adjusted to address these fears

Deferred to the Tribe to define their relationship with their environment and where they perceived harm

Offer Patience

Placed no end point on our dedication and commitment to serve the Tribe

Exercise Flexibility

Trusted in the Tribe to know the best place to start in addressing their concerns

Extend Trust
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