

Mercury poison: Grassy Narrows to release new report on devastating health impacts

50 years after dumping began governments refuse to acknowledge Minamata Disease

Toronto – The people of Grassy Narrows are still suffering from the debilitating health impacts of mercury poison fifty years after a Dryden mill began dumping 10 tonnes of the neurotoxin into Grassy Narrows' English-Wabigoon River. Indigenous Grassy Narrows community members are travelling 2,000 km to Toronto by foot, train, and bus to release a newly translated health study on their community by renowned Japanese mercury expert Dr. Harada. They will speak out about their long road to justice, challenge the Premier to eat their local fish, and join hundreds of supporters in deploying 15,000 square feet of blue fabric to create a wild river that will flow to Queen's Park to demand long overdue justice for their people and protection for the waters and forests on which they depend.

PRESS CONFERENCE. Monday June 4, 11:00 a.m.

Where: Steelworkers Hall, 25 Cecil St. (South of College, East of Spadina).

Speakers: Chief Simon Fobister, Ontario Regional Chief Angus Toulouse, Dr. Hanada (report co-author), Judy Da Silva (Grassy Narrows mother and activist), and Craig Benjamin (Amnesty International).

Content: The disturbing results of the latest Grassy Narrows mercury health study will be released in English, and discussed by the speakers who will call for action from the government.

SPEAK OUT. Tuesday June 5, 6:30 p.m.

Topic: Pollution in Our Water, Poison in Our Bodies.

Where: Steelworkers Hall, 25 Cecil St. (South of College, East of Spadina).

Featuring: Judy Da Silva of Grassy Narrows, Dr. Masanori Hanada, Lee Maracle, Joanne Webb of CUPE.

FISH FRY. Wednesday June 6, Noon.

What: Grassy Narrows challenges Premier McGuinty to eat their local fish at a traditional fish fry on an open wood fire.

Where: Queens Park south lawn.

RIVER RUN creative march and rally. Friday June 8, Noon.

Visual: Grassy Narrows people, and hundreds of their supporters, will deploy 15,000 square feet of blue fabric rippling in the wind to create a wild river that will flow to Queen's Park to demand justice, accompanied by traditional drummers, and by colourful fish puppets.

Where: Starting at Grange Park (behind the AGO on Beverly south of Dundas).

End: Arriving at Queen's Park around 1:15 p.m. for speeches and demands.

Speakers: Grassy Narrows mothers, Chief Fobister, Bruce Cox (Greenpeace ED), Joanne Webb (CUPE ON), Maryam Adrangi (Council of Canadians).

For more information go to: FreeGrassy.org

#grassyriverrun

<https://www.facebook.com/events/198094780296146/>

BACKGROUND

Renowned Japanese mercury expert Dr. Harada first visited the Indigenous communities of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog in 1975. He found people with mercury levels over 3 times the Health Canada limit in Grassy Narrows, and 7 times the limit in Whitedog. When he returned in 2004 he found that 43% of his original Grassy Narrows patients were dead, including all those who had mercury levels above the Health Canada guidelines in 1975.

Between 1962 and 1970 the Dryden mill dumped 10 tonnes of mercury into the Wabigoon River, with the province's permission. The people of Asubpeeschoseewagong (Grassy Narrows), Wabaseemoong (Whitedog), and some members of Wabauskang First Nation who lived at Quibell were downstream and were hurt by the health, social, and economic impacts of this poison. Overnight unemployment in Grassy Narrows skyrocketed, a sacred food staple was lost, and the source of disturbing neurological health conditions became apparent. Mercury levels in Grassy Narrows fish have yet to return to safe levels.

A 2005 study of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog people by Dr. Harada found that Health Canada safety guidelines are too weak to protect people from the cumulative long-term health impacts of low level mercury exposure, which is now ubiquitous worldwide due to industrial pollution from sources such as chemical plants, coal burning power plants, and incinerators.

In 2010 the elderly Dr. Harada returned for his final visit to Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. He examined 160 people of all ages for the health impacts of mercury poisoning, something Health Canada has not done in over a decade. The results of his study give the most current and authoritative scientific assessment of the impacts of mercury on the people of Grassy Narrows and Whitedog. The report will be released in English for the first time at the press conference on June 4.

Mercury is a potent neurotoxin which accumulates in the food chain and whose health impacts include tunnel vision, loss of coordination, numbness in the extremities, tremors, loss of balance, and speech impediments.