



FACT SHEET: Grants for Research on Environmental Risks Associated with Tribal Lifestyles and Cultural Practices

DESCRIPTION: To help understand the health effects of contaminants in the environment on tribal populations, EPA has awarded five Science to Achieve Results (STAR) grants to five institutions in the United States. Research teams, including tribal participants, will focus on subsistence issues related to mercury, PCBs, pesticides and other chemicals. Management strategies leading to a reduction in risk from exposure to these and other chemicals will also be investigated. Each grant employs culturally-sensitive methods that underscore subsistence practice and tribal lifeways, while also addressing important exposure issues in tribal communities.

BACKGROUND: Tribes may be at especially high risk for environmentally-caused diseases because of their subsistence lifestyles, occupations and customs and/or environmental releases impacting tribal lands. In 2002, EPA STAR awarded a \$1.2 million research grant to the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, located in the state of Washington. As part of this effort, researchers are studying 16 shellfish harvest areas in Washington that are commonly used by the Swinomish Tribal Community for the presence of several chemicals and heavy metals.

In January 2002, EPA announced a Request for Applications (RFA) on tribal subsistence concerns called "Lifestyle and Cultural Practices of Tribal Populations and Risks from Toxic Substances in the Environment." The RFA was issued in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in response to a request from the tribes to the National EPA-Tribal Science Council. The RFA focused on research related to the lifestyle and cultural practices of tribal populations and risks from toxic substances in the environment. Research concentrates on two areas of interest: (1) developing exposure and effects assessment methods that can be broadly applied across geographic regions and tribal populations, and (2) risk management strategies and options that will lead to reduction in risk from pollutant exposures. Tribes were required to be part of the research teams.

GRANT RECIPIENTS AND WHAT THEY ARE STUDYING:

- **"Environmental Contaminants in Foodstuffs of Siberian Yu'piks from St. Lawrence Island, Alaska."** The Siberian Yu'pik people of St. Lawrence Island, Alaska, have relatively high serum levels of PCBs and pesticides. Alaska Community Action on Toxics, in partnership with researchers at the State University of New York at Albany, will examine traditional foods of the Yu'pik people for PCBs, three pesticides and several metals to determine which are the most significant sources of exposure, and how food preparation influences the levels of contaminants. **Research Team:** Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Anchorage, Alaska and State University of New York at Albany

- “Risks to Northern Alaskan Inupiat: Assessing Potential Effects of Oil Contamination on Subsistence Lifestyles, Health, and Nutrition.”** Building on existing collaborations with local authorities and citizens of Alaska’s Northern Slope, researchers will develop outreach tools and messages, delivered by appropriate Native spokespersons, so that Alaskan Inupiat will be able to make informed decisions on how they might reduce their risk from hydrocarbon exposure and to maintain good nutrition and health. Native populations with subsistence lifestyles in the Arctic may have exposed to petroleum hydrocarbons in their diets from many sources.
Research Team: Mote Marine Laboratory, Sarasota, Florida and the Department of Wildlife Management, Northern Slope Borough, Barrow, Alaska
- “Takotisa'tstentsera:wis Ne Ohontsia: Reducing Risk by Restoring Relationships.”** Research teams will examine the impacts of toxic substances on the traditional cultural practices of Haudenosaunee Nations. Teachers, youth, and the Akwesasne Environmental Task Force staff will be trained to reduce the risk associated with exposure to toxic substances while continuing to support traditional cultural practices.
Research Team: Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment, Inc., Hogansburg, New York
- “Lifestyles and Cultural Practices of Tribal Populations and Risks from Toxic Substances in the Environment.”** This partnership between tribal and university researchers will prepare regional scenarios that illustrate where tribes are traditionally exposed to environmental contaminants. The scenarios will be based on the major ecological zones across the U.S. mainland and are modifiable so that they can be site-specific for individual tribal use.
Research Team: Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon
- “Reducing Risks of the Anishinaabe from Methylmercury.”** Tribal researchers in collaboration with Citizens for a Better Environment of Milwaukee, will develop, implement, and evaluate a comprehensive, systematic and culturally sensitive intervention program to reduce risks associated with subsistence-based consumption of fish contaminated by methylmercury. The study will focus on the Anishinaabe tribe in Northern Wisconsin.
Research Team: Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission, Odanah, Wisconsin, and Citizens for a Better Environment of Milwaukee

WHAT IS THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF MONEY FOR THESE AWARDS? Five institutions will receive \$2.2 million for three years of study (each institution is receiving an award of approximately \$450,000).

CONTACT:

Nigel Fields, EPA National Center for Environmental Research at (202) 343-9767 or fields.nigel@epa.gov.