

Monday, April 17, 2023

Open Letter to Governments & Ring of Fire Metals from Norman Shewaybick on the **Demand for a Fire Truck & Fire Station in Webequie First Nation** Parallel to the Study on the Webequie Supply Road



I would like to start by saying I am writing in the capacity of a Webequie First Nation member, resident of the community and caretaker of my homelands which happen to be located in the area known as the Ring of Fire where high-grade critical minerals like nickel, copper, cobalt, chrome, platinum and palladium are known to thrive below-ground in the permafrost on our traditional territories and where an [all-season supply road](#) is currently being studied, led by my First Nation.

On April 7, 2023 the home that my family has been occupying since 1999 burned to the ground. It housed 8 of us in total (and yes, we had working smoke alarms). Luckily, we were all able to self-rescue without injury before the fire spread. The house was engulfed in flames within 20 minutes. All we had was a measly fire extinguisher. We lost everything. We are grateful for contributions to a [crowd funding campaign](#) but we no home to return to. An unofficial investigation has speculated that the cause was 'undetermined.' Last fall another fire left families homeless because there are no fire services to call. **In Webequie First Nation, there is no fire services, there are no enforceable fire codes, there is no fire truck and there is no fire station!**

While we live in poverty, our lands are being valued in the trillions and exploration/mining is being aggressively pushed to promote Canada and Ontario's future prosperity. As you know, Ring of Fire Metals (formerly Wyloo Metals and Noront Resources) is the current company overseeing these mining claims provided by Ontario. We may be living with third world conditions, but our lands are pristine and we will protect them.

We have heard that when the De Beers mine was in operation near Attawapiskat First Nation, De Beers avoided the problem of lack of infrastructure by putting in 'company-only' services (like clean drinking water). This will not happen in Webequie First Nation and I will advocate amongst the people of my community that meeting our basic infrastructure needs (starting with a fire station and fire truck) should come before the supply road and other development. Our people know that we still have a strong voice regardless of what is happening with both levels of government. As recently as April 10, 2023, we learned that Attawapiskat First Nation [have not fared better](#) having allowed development to

take place and that they are still in a humanitarian crisis! This scenario will not be repeated in Webequie First Nation.

Additionally, I would like to call attention to the fact that the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal (OFM) has not been providing services in Webequie First Nation despite the responsibility to promote fire protection, fire prevention and public safety for all of Ontario. It is my view that remote First Nations in Ontario are not even on their radar. It is preposterous that legislation like the *Ontario Mining Act* is fully applicable on our lands but not the *Ontario Fire Protection Act* or *Ontario Fire Code* and that governments have not already found a way to work with remote First Nations in Ontario.

A Statistics Canada study found that Indigenous people living on-reserves were 10 times more likely to die in a fire than non-Indigenous people. It also found that Indigenous people were four times more likely to be hospitalized because of a fire-related injury. What is often not considered is the larger perspective when looking at remote communities. When fires occur in remote communities such as Webequie First Nation, it is not the same as other First Nations. Here, fires destroy our limited number of homes that we cannot immediately replenish, creates a displacement of families and affects the housing back-log. More immediate action must be done to protect the ISC investments that are being put into our current housing supply.

While I am sympathetic to the war in Ukraine, I am disheartened to know that Canada has committed over \$1 billion in donations since February 22, 2022 (with more to be provided) and yet, Webequie First Nation people are required to use a fire extinguisher to put out a house fire and have no firetruck or fire station? **I am demanding that immediate efforts are made to replace our fire extinguishers with a fire truck and fire station in Webequie First Nation.**

While I do not have the firm costs of these, I would surmise that it would cost from \$700K – \$999K and could be project managed up until the next 2024 winter road season. I understand that the costs of a bulldozer are similar to the costs of a fire station—why are governments prioritizing bulldozers before a fire station/fire truck that would not only protect the people of Webequie First Nation but, employees of the potential Eagles Nest project and others? Governments need to start seeing the bigger picture and need to make reparations before continued preparations. In my opinion, this is why the people are distrustful when they experience the socio-economic conditions of our community all the while the province of Ontario has already invested \$1 billion. Our community has not seen any benefit from this.

I understand that Canada has been making efforts to address fatal fires in First Nations across Canada and have recently come up with challenges like [no willing partners, including AFN, to bring First Nations bring in enforceable fire codes](#). While we anxiously wait for this long-standing issue to be resolved—I am demanding that, instead, an alternative approach be implemented for Webequie First Nation given the years of work we have done already with the company now known as Ring of Fire Metals as an addition to the new phase of collaboration that was [announced on December 7, 2022](#). We do not have time to wait for governments to address fire safety in First Nations, we need action now within a *cost of doing business/socially responsible investing* approach. An opportunity to address social justice is available in Webequie First Nation, this time for the distribution of the privilege of having a fire station and a fire truck.

It is for the reasons above that I make the following demands that should not result in any additional costs to Webequie First Nation:

1. Investors and leadership of Ring of Fire Metals amend the current Memorandum of Understanding with Webequie First Nation to include the provision of a fire station and fire truck for delivery during the 2024 winter road season.

2. That the governments provide financial resources to ensure that the fire truck will have access to required water pressurization in order for it to fully operate to adequately extinguish a fire.
3. That consideration be made to work with Matawa First Nations Management Technical Services to make the above a reality.
4. That updates on the above be provided to the people of Webequie First Nation on a regular basis.
5. That the Office of the Ontario Fire Marshal provides the training and resources to establish fire services in Webequie First Nation in line with the timelines above and maintain a fire services department into the future.

Sincerely,

ON BEHALF OF HOUSE FIRE SURVIVORS JANET, KEISHA, KENNETH, DEJA, SIMONE, KREELYNN & BRANDON AND THE NEXT 7 GENERATIONS OF WEBEQUIE FIRST NATION

Original Signed By

Norman Shewaybick, Webequie First Nation

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