

SARNIA & LAMBTON

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Concerns not taken seriously: Plain

ENVIRONMENT A MAJOR ISSUE FOR NATIVES

By DAN McCAFFERY
The Observer

A native environmentalist says when it comes to pollution, the concerns of Sarnia's Aamjiwnaang First Nation are not being taken as seriously as those of industry.

Ron Plain, chairperson of the band's environmental

committee, told The Observer recently many people on the reserve are upset with comments being made by industrial and political leaders as they push for a local public health study.

Calls for such a probe emerged in the wake of media reports that suggested a sharp decline in male births on the reserve might be the result of industrial pollution. The Aamjiwnaang First Nation is virtually surrounded by petrochemical complexes.

In a recent interview with

The Observer, Scott Munro of the Sarnia-Lambton Environmental Association (SLEA) said his members want the federal government to launch a comprehensive public health study and put an end to what it calls "speculative" media reports.

Mayor Mike Bradley also endorsed the proposed health study, saying "there have been many anecdotal media reports but no comprehensive look at health in our community."

Plain said while data produced by industry is accepted

as fact, studies indicating pollution may be causing problems on the reserve are dismissed as "speculative."

He added whenever natives express concerns about pollution they are accused of hurting local tourism.

Plain said natives were not consulted prior to the latest statements by SLEA members. "If you're going to talk about us, then talk to us," he said.

The band's environmental committee made it clear it does not oppose a public health study, issuing a press

release last week in which it commended local industry for its willingness to "discuss a comprehensive approach."

But it added a "focused look at the Aamjiwnaang community is needed to address the concerns of residents — concerns that emanate from the knowledge that they are bombarded daily by myriad pollutants that have, perhaps, collected in their bodies over a period of 60 years."

Munro said the association is not dismissive of native concerns. The study that

found fewer boys were being born on the reserve identified an issue, but did not pinpoint the cause, he said.

He said a public health study would not be led by industry "It needs to be a third party."

And the First Nation would have to be included in the probe, he said.

In addition to the native birth ratio study, numerous investigations have been conducted over the years related to everything from local cancer rates to asthma and other smog-related problems.