

A'ki/The Land

Aamjiwnaang protesting proposed ethanol plant in their backyard

By Bob Goulais

SARNIA – The Chippewas of Aamjiwnaang have stepped up their fight against a proposed fuel refinery in their backyard. On April 10, a hand-full of demonstrators marched on the Suncor refinery in Sarnia, Ontario – speaking out against the corporation's proposed development of an Ethanol plant.

SunCor Energy Products Inc., owner of the Sunoco brand-name, has purchased industrial property in Sarnia a stones-throw away from the

bustling First Nation community of about 1000 people.

"We are opposing the plant as it encroaches on our right to have a health, sustainable, safe community and our right to exclusive use and enjoyment of our land" said Darren Henry, band councillor for Aamjiwnaang.

Ethanol is an alcohol that is made from corn or grain. The product is then blended with gasoline to create a more environmentally-friendly fuel.

"We're not opposed to alternative

fuels. We just opposed to have another industry being built across the street. And I mean directly across the street."

The long weekend demonstration prompted a response from Suncor, who met with some of the demonstrators.

"We acknowledge the Aamjiwnaang community's concerns about our proposed ethanol plant. We have made no decisions on a location for this proposed plant," said Kirk Bailey, vice president of Suncor's Sarnia refinery.

Although, Henry understands that Suncor has an alternative site for the project, that hasn't brought the guard down for his community.

"They do have an alternative site in mind. But the land across from our community – they bought that, and they have indicated to us that they intend to use that for expansion," said Henry. "Something is going to be there, we don't know what it's going to be."

According to Suncor, the proposed ethanol plant capable of producing more than 200 million litres of ethanol that would be blended into Sunoco gasolines. For Henry and the Aamjiwnaang council, "the variables and unknowns are too risky".

"We are talking to people about ethanol concerns and the cumulative effect of the industry," said Henry. "We had a study done in 1996, and it talks about some of the chemical effects we may have. There are some concerns over high readings of PCBs, mercury, and a chemical called chlorohexabenzene (a carcinogen). We have concern about that concentration in our community."

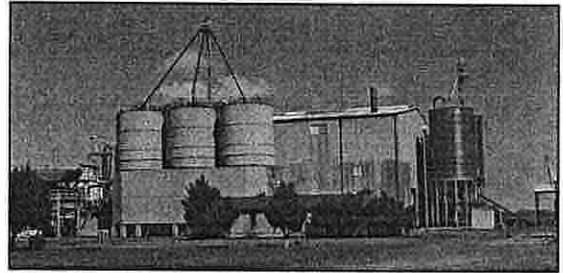
However, the biggest concern for Aamjiwnaang is the actual physical location of the plant.

"We just don't know what the risk assessments are," said Henry citing a number of health and safety concerns such as fire, explosion, increased traffic activity, and emissions. "There's a lot of talk about bringing all that corn in, and what that will attract as far as rodents and things like that so close to our community," added Henry.

Public consultation and environmental assessment process are currently underway, and the First Nation and Suncor have been meeting face-to-face.

"Over the past year, we've participated in regular meetings with the Chief, Aamjiwnaang Council and representatives of their community. We're committed to continuing this dialogue," said Bailey. "We invite the Aamjiwnaang leadership and community representatives to continue this consultation so we can better understand their concerns and discuss ways to resolve them."

The Chippewas of Aamjiwnaang have presented a petition containing more than 1200 signatures against the



Ethanol Plant in Tucumcari, New Mexico is a hybrid of a grain storage facility, alcohol-distiller and fuel refining and storage facility. This plant is capable of producing 8220 gallons of ethanol per day, which is only a small fraction of the proposed Suncor Sarnia plant.

project, to the Suncor executive and the various federal and provincial regulators including Natural Resources Canada, Environment Canada as well as the Minister of Indian Affairs.

Suncor recently announced it has

received funding under Natural Resources Canada's Ethanol Expansion Program. The federal government will contribute \$22 million towards the construction of the facility.

Ethanol plant gets federal funding

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To supply it with enough corn, Ontario producers would need to boost production to 1.18 million bushels annually, said Don McCabe, an Inwood farmer and director of the Ontario Corn Producers' Association.

Nearly half of all Ontario corn is grown within a 125-mile radius of Sarnia.

Speaking to local leaders gathered for a news conference, McCabe said the plant will would inject

1.18 million bushels from 980 million a year into the rural economy.

"The spinoffs will be great," he said. Suncor has spent \$3 million on preliminary engineering and hopes to have the plant ready for production by mid-2006.

The Canadian-based company, through its Sunoco stations, is the only major gasoline retailer to sell ethanol-blend gasolines in Ontario.