

Aamjiwnaang profiled in new textbook

By SHAWN JEFFORDS, THE OBSERVER July 14, 2010

A high school science textbook that profiles Aamjiwnaang's history of environmental problems should be used in local classrooms, says a member of the First Nation's environment committee.

Published by McGraw-Hill- Ryerson, ON Science 9 contains a case study of the Chemical Valley and its impact on residents who live in its shadow.

The text is not currently used in by Lambton Kent District School Board.

"I'm heartbroken our students aren't using this book," said Ada Lockridge. "I wanted to know who puts these books in our schools? Why isn't it being shown here? What's the big secret?"

The textbook details the low male birth rate on the reserve and local efforts to monitor the air for pollutants. Lockridge has met with school board administrators to discuss the book, which was released in 2009. They hadn't heard of it but promised to look into it, she said.

"This stuff should be taught in this area."

The band has worked for years to shed more light on the health effects of members who live in close proximity to industry.

Public school trustee Paul Millman said he wants to review the text but is open to it being taught locally. The extent of the pollution at Aamjiwnaang has been a subject of controversy for years, which makes it worthy of classroom instruction, he said.

"I'm a big believer in challenging our students to think," Millman said. "Education is about thinking, not just about learning. If it challenges the students and it's fairly neutral (that's good). I've seen some stuff over the years that I would call propaganda."

Millman said the curriculum is largely drafted in Toronto, which doesn't always sit well with local teachers who want a percentage of the content developed locally.

"The province likes to have their finger in every piece of the pie," he said. " ... A lot of educators would like to tell Toronto where to go and do it completely on our own. Now that's not going to happen, but it's a percentage game."

Millman said if the text presents the material in a "non-biased" way he'd support its local introduction.

"In public education we like to say we represent everybody. I would think there should be a place for it in the curriculum," he said.