

Shortage of sons scares Sarnia tribe

KEEP OUT: A sign warns of toxic substances in Talfourd Creek at the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. The Chippewa Indian reservation is surrounded by Sarnia chemical plants. Associated Press



Chemical Valley pollutants suspected as cause of disturbing trend

By **MATT CRENSON**
The Associated Press

SARNIA — Biologist Michael Gilbertson was examining pollution levels in Chemical Valley when he asked a seemingly simple question and received a startling answer.

Two girls are born for every one boy on the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, a Chippewa Indian reservation that adjoins the mas-

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sive cluster of chemical plants and refineries.

The sex ratio is so out of whack, scientific and medical experts say, it can only have been caused by serious environmental contamination.

In normal conditions, the sex ratio of newborn babies is nearly 50-50, with slightly more boys than girls. Gilbertson describes the sex ratio as "a very sensitive indicator of effects going on as a result of exposure to chemicals."

It's not the only medical issue for the 850 people living on the Aamjiwnaang reservation, which lies across the St. Clair River

from Marysville.

Statistics also show:

- Aamjiwnaang children suffer from asthma at nearly three times the rate of other Canadian children.
- Four of 10 women on the reserve had had at least one miscarriage or stillbirth.
- One in four children has behavioral or learning disabilities.

The statistics raise more questions than they answer.

What's causing the harm? If it is pollution, is it being carried on the wind to neighboring communities such as Sarnia, Maryville and Port Huron, or by water to downstream towns such as Marine City, Algonac and Detroit?

Gilbertson and other experts cannot say. All they know with certainty is that there is a problem — a very serious problem.