

Parents still want all of asbestos out of schools

November 3/89

Marion Martin shuffles through No. 8 school on the Six Nations reserve with many questions - the kind of queries that have earned her the name of nitpicker.

She wondered aloud whether the fire alarm works, whether the peeling duct tape on ceiling tiles would prevent asbestos fibres from seeping through and whether the gaps between the pipes and the ceiling would allow still more asbestos to enter the classroom.

She says band council resolutions and asbestos experts hold little weight with her anymore. Two months of conflicting reports and experts have left the chairman of the Six Nations and New Credit Schools Committee cynical at best.

Although Six Nations Chief Coun. William Montour decided to send the children back to school on Nov. 13, she says her grandchildren won't be among the troops returning to class.

Mrs. Martin is among a group of parents who want all the asbestos out of the buildings before classes resume. She says she will demand Indian Affairs bus her grandchildren to one of the new portables or schools without asbestos if the schools open in 10 days. "They'll have to make arrangements to meet my demands."

She says reports from Indian Affairs in the past two months are the reason for her cynicism.

Declared safe

In September Indian Affairs said the 12 elementary schools on the reserve were safe for occupancy. Since then, several of the old turn-of-the-century, asbestos-polluted schools have been demolished.

The department announced on Wednesday that the last old school, No. 3, will be demolished. "Yet up until Wednesday that school was fine for the students," said Mrs. Martin.

Mike Ivanski, Indian Affairs director of Indian Services for Ontario, said in an interview

this week that the decision to destroy No. 3 was made because of the cost of running the building. "It is old and it isn't the greatest. We thought it would be better to demolish it and replace it with portables."

On Wednesday a report from Health and Welfare Canada listed five pages of repairs that still have to be done before the schools are ready for occupancy.

"Everybody wonders why it's going so long and everybody wonders why we're so upset. . . If they'd (Indian Affairs) had done it right the first time there might not be a problem," said Mrs. Martin.

To remedy the trust problem that has developed during the two-month boycott of elementary schools on the reserve, Indian Affairs has agreed to hire an independent inspector to look at the schools.

Kim Coulter, vice-president of Tillyard Scientific Services Ltd. in Brampton, has been hired to do the independent testing of the schools.

Mr. Ivanski said "if independent tests show there is unsafe levels of asbestos I have no choice. I have to shut the school down."

Dennise Powless, mother of three children, says parents have asked for a more costly, but sensitive, air test called Transmission Electron Microscopy (TEM). Federal government inspectors have been using a standard Phase Contrast Microscopy (PCM) to test the schools.

Although the PCM test is acceptable, TEM is recognized by experts to be a better quality, "state-of-the-art" method of testing.

"They've been giving us results from an occupational standard. But this isn't a factory, these are classrooms with children we are talking about," said Ms. Powless.

Kim Coulter, of Tillyard Scientific Services Limited in Brampton, confirmed this morning that he has been retained to perform the independent testing. He said he will be using the TEM method.