

Salt River chief joins chorus of those calling for rationing at liquor stores during coronavirus threat

Written By: John McFadden

Salt River First Nation Chief David Poitras is calling for limits on how much liquor a person can buy at one time in the territory's liquor stores.

Poitras says he is only recommending that take place for the duration of the COVID-19 threat.

Poitras told the Dene Nation that rationing alcohol could help prevent parties with large gatherings of people, something the chief public health officer (CPHO) of the Northwest has strongly advised against.

Dr. Kami Kandola would prefer people just stay home at this time and not allow people into their homes unless they live there.

She also does not want to see gatherings of ten or more people outside.

Poitras says if the doctor is serious about banning parties then she must restrict the sale of alcohol.

He adds closing liquor stores entirely would only help feed the bootlegging trade and shortening store hours would just lead people to stockpile alcohol.

Poitras recently posted a phone number to social media, a hotline if you will, where people can report others who are not following the coronavirus protocols in terms of social distancing and self-isolation.

"I just wanted to get the message out. There has been a lot of concerns about parties so I thought it would help. This is a matter of life or death," Poitras said. "I called the number. There was no red tape. They just took the information and called me back the next day."

Poitras says there have been some concerns that because of Salt River's geographic closeness to the Alberta boundary that people were coming up from Alberta to the NWT and not self-isolating as they are supposed to.

He adds that some of those concerns have been eliminated now that there are GNWT personnel monitoring exactly who is arriving in the NWT by road and who is landing at the Fort Smith airport and other airports in the territory.

Poitras says he believes that the majority of people in his community are following the coronavirus protocols at this time but concedes that some are not.

He is encouraging his people to use the hotline if they see someone breaking the rules.

"This is no game. I didn't feel guilt when I reported this one person. I have children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. I want them to be safe," Poitras said. "Then there are people like me. I am 76 years old. I have asthma. If I get this virus, I'm dead."

There are still only five diagnosed cases of COVID-19 in the NWT as of Tuesday and the message from Poitras and health officials in the NWT remains the same and simple.

Stay home, try to stay at least six feet from others, wash your hands a lot and support each other.

We will get through this together.