

## **Alcohol ban in Tuktoyaktuk already paying dividends, hamlet's mayor says**

**Written By: By John McFadden**

Although it has only been in place since April 14th, the alcohol ban in the Beaufort Delta community of Tuktoyaktuk is already paying off.

That is according to the hamlet's mayor Erwin Elias who says it was done to help try to prevent the coronavirus from entering the community.

"We did this to try to reduce the traffic in the community. There was too much traffic, particularly from Inuvik where the liquor store is," Elias told the Dene Nation. "People were coming in from Inuvik and they wanted to party. People were not respecting the social distancing.

Elias says he has seen less parties, fewer groups of people and a more positive atmosphere in Tuk since the ban went into effect.

He adds that the GNWT had made it clear that it was not going to shut down the liquor stores in the Northwest Territories during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Elias says that forced the hamlet council, including himself, to take matters into its own hands.

They voted unanimously for the ban, Elias said.

He says the prohibition will last until April 24th when the situation will be re-evaluated.

"My argument to the territorial government was we are the ones who are living here. We know what is going on in our community. The volume of calls has already gone down significantly with the RCMP," Elias said.

He agrees that the consumption of a limited amount of alcohol is not necessarily a bad thing.

It is when people overconsume that he says they let their guards down, and host or attend parties where social distancing protocols are not being followed.

Elias says that having a checkpoint at the edge of town has also allowed for closer monitoring of who is in Tuk and exactly what they are up to.

He says it can be challenging to deal with the threat of a pandemic in such a small community.

Elias pointed to the Spanish Flu epidemic in the early 20th century which killed scores of people in the North.

He says people are fearful that if the coronavirus established a footing in Tuktoyaktuk, the same thing could happen again.

Elias says he understands other communities in the NWT may be considering similar bans.

He adds that he doesn't expect the government to close liquor stores completely but he is calling for restrictions on how much booze anyone can buy at one time.

The mayor says he wants to see people access the funding that has been made available to hit the grocery store, gas up the ATV or snow machine and head out onto the land as a way to avoid the COVID-19 threat.

Elias said another challenge in Tuk right now is that residents have just come through a cold, dark winter.

They want to get out of their homes and visit but most of them are aware they are not supposed to do that at this time, Elias said.