

## **Chief of K'atl'odeeche First Nation says liquor restrictions don't go far enough**

**Written By: By John McFadden**

The chief of the K'atl'odeeche First Nation in Hay River says the liquor restrictions imposed by the Government of the Northwest Territories will do little to limit alcohol consumption during the coronavirus threat.

April Martel told the Dene Nation she has her doubts about the liquor restrictions on April 17th, the day after the GNWT announced the liquor limits.

The restrictions limit the number of 375 millilitre (mikie) bottles any person can buy at one time to six.

They also limit the amount of money any one person can spend on alcohol at a time to \$200.

The move follows recommendations from MLAs and other officials including a passionate plea from Dene National Chief Norman Yakeleya to restrict alcohol sales during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indigenous leaders agree that alcohol leads to gatherings where social distancing protocols are easier to ignore.

"I know they can't shut down entirely. Some of our people have been through trauma, residential schools. I'd love to see the liquor store shut down but some of our people would get sick," Martel said. "If they got sick the health department and the Hay River Hospital would not be ready to help all these people going through the DTs with the shock to their bodies."

Martel adds that if people want alcohol badly enough, they will find ways to get it.

She says that includes travelling to High Level, Alberta to buy it.

That's the last thing the community wants as it would increase the chances of someone bringing the coronavirus back into the community.

She says the \$200 limit is too high noting that you can buy a lot of wine, beer and spirits for \$200.

Martel says she has also expressed frustration to Chief Yakeleya and other government officials about what she describes as the rising price of food at grocery stores in Hay River.

She wants to know, if fuel suppliers were able to lower their prices when COVID-19 started, why the grocery stores couldn't follow suit or at the very least cap their prices at pre-virus levels.

Martel says the first nation's initiative to close the community to outsiders when the coronavirus threat began has obviously worked in that there are no diagnosed cases on K'atl'odchee.

She adds that security guards have broken up a few parties and issued warnings but believes for the most part community members are honouring the COVID-19 protocols imposed by the chief medical health officer of the Northwest Territories.

They include staying at least two metres from other people, not gathering in groups and staying home as much as possible.

Martel adds that many community members have taken advantage of funding to go out on the land as a way of practicing social distancing.

She, like all the chiefs the Dene Nation has spoken to recently, believes the COVID-19 pandemic will be overcome.

But Martel adds we must remember we are all in this together and we must help each other when we can.