



The 24TH NAVAJO NATION COUNCIL
Office of the Speaker

MEDIA CONTACTS

Alray Nelson, Communications Director
Kyrin Hardy, Public Information Officer
E-mail: nnlb.communications@gmail.com
Phone: (928) 565-0440

Failed Septic and Waste Systems a growing concern for Navajo Nation Leaders

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MANY FARMS, Ariz. — Speaker Seth Damon and Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. of the 24th Navajo Nation Council share their concerns about failing septic and solid waste systems in households across the Navajo Nation, causing significant health risks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Delegate Begay has gathered over 169 statements from households across the Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, and Low Mountain Chapters indicating failing septic or solid waste systems. By request of the Indian Health Service and Office of Environmental Health and Engineering (OEHE), the latitude and longitude GPS coordinates for each home were submitted for consideration.

Working with local community leaders, chapter officials request the OEHE to evaluate, re-engineer, or replace these failing septic systems affecting hundreds of Navajo families that rely on local sanitation services.

“This growing sanitary situation is becoming a serious environmental contamination issue that impacts the health and safety of the Navajo people. During this pandemic, our families must reside in homes that are sanitary while getting access to clean drinking water. Four chapters I represent have submitted GPS locations of homes where septic waste systems are failing following an extensive review process. 169 OEHE applications in my region were submitted for assistance,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

According to the FY2021 Annual Report on Sanitation Deficiency Levels for Indian Homes and Communities, it is reported that over 15,000 homes in the Navajo Nation need sanitation facility improvements. The Indian Health Service reported their commitment to funding pump trucks for certain Navajo communities and septic tank disposal facilities, but the need for failed septic systems remains unmet.

“The possible environmental contamination of our land and water due to sewage ponding is a serious concern for the Navajo Nation Council. Too many failed septic systems are affecting the quality of life of our Navajo people, and it will impact the health of those most vulnerable. This is a health emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic to be addressed by Indian Health Service Director Roselyn Tso and the Interior Department. We ask Acting Director Gordon Tsatoke Jr. from the Office of Environmental Health and Engineering to process the 169 applications and conduct further outreach to communities to solve this matter immediately,” said Speaker Seth Damon (Bááháálí, Chichiltah, Manuelito, Tsé Łichíí’, Rock Springs, Tsayatoh).

The Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS) is an inventory of projects developed to address existing sanitation deficiencies in American Indian and Alaska Native communities. This guidance document provides the standards and procedures for identifying weaknesses, developing projects, and prioritizing tasks. In the 2021 listing, six waterline extension projects are listed for Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, and Low Mountain Chapters.

“The Navajo Nation Council will continue to work with the Environmental Protection Agency and Navajo Tribal Utility Authority to solve the growing sanitation problem. It must be noted that the Indian Health Service is utilizing the same construction materials for all their 2021 SDS projects that have failed over the years. This means that even when the SDS waterline list is complete, our Navajo people will have the same septic and waste disposal problems again in several years. We need to find a solution now and protect the health of our Navajo families,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Delegate Begay requested further field visits from the Navajo Nation EPA to assess the growing situation at homesteads across the central agency.

The Division of Sanitation Facilities Construction administers a nationwide Sanitation Facilities Construction (SFC) Program responsible for delivering environmental engineering services and sanitation facilities across Indian Country. The SFC Program accomplishes its responsibilities by allocating available resources to the twelve Indian Health Service (IHS) area offices. Additional information is available here: <https://www.ihs.gov/dsfc/>

The 2021 Sanitation Deficiency System project listing is available here: https://www.ihs.gov/sites/dsfc/themes/responsive2017/display_objects/documents/FY_2021_Appendix_Project_Listing.pdf

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