

Developing a Tribal Environmental Code in Kwigillingok, Alaska: Changing behaviors to keep the community clean

Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Success Story



The Native Village of Kwigillingok used Indian Environmental General Assistance Program funding to tackle delicate solid waste disposal problems while beautifying the community.

Abandoned contractor waste



Like many other rural Alaskan communities with transportation and shipping challenges due to lack of access to the road system, contractors from outside Kwigillingok typically abandoned trash and scrap equipment when construction projects ended. Sometimes heavy equipment used for construction damaged the land and posed safety risks to pedestrians.

Instead of properly disposing of garbage in the community's self-haul landfill, some residents were either leaving it in their yards or dumping it on the banks of the Kwigillingok River. The improper disposal of wastes in the community was unsightly, hazardous to public health and water quality, and potentially harmful to subsistence.

In 2013, the Native Village of Kwigillingok took steps towards preserving the land for future generations by developing an enforceable environmental code that educates contractors and the community, and sends a message that these kinds of behaviors are unacceptable.

The adoption of the environmental code authorized the Kwigillingok Tribal Court to exercise its authority to take action against code violators, typically in the form of fines. Darrel John, the tribe's IGAP Coordinator says that the first step in developing the code was conducting online research and speaking with other communities. John worked with the tribal court to ensure the environmental code was in a legal format, then shared it with the tribal administrator and council.

Once the tribal council approved the code, GAP staff went door-to-door to encourage residents to attend a meeting about it. The meeting raised awareness and resulted in a majority supporting the new code.

"Developing the code was effective in sending a message to the community members and contractors," says John. "There have been probably less than 10 violators." The code has encouraged contractors to ship their garbage and excess supplies and equipment out of the village, instead of leaving it behind. It also prevented community members from dumping their garbage on the banks of the river, and prevents dumping honey bucket waste in unmaintained pits.



River bank — after code adopted



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The Native Village of Kwigillingok has been a GAP grant recipient since 1999. In addition to their environmental code, the tribe's recycling program is also aimed at reducing waste going into the landfill and educating the community. It took off in 2005. Plans for the future include collaborating with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to construct a new landfill and access road.

Partners & Support

Native Village of Kwigillingok Tribal Court
Enforcement of the environmental code

Native Village of Kwigillingok Police Department
Enforcement of the environmental code

Community Profile: Kwigillingok

Population: 364

Culture: Kwigillingok is a traditional Yup'ik Eskimo village with commercial fishing and a subsistence lifestyle.

Location: Kwigillingok is on the western shore of Kuskokwim Bay, 77 miles southwest of Bethel and 388 miles west of Anchorage.

Transportation: Kwigillingok has no roads. In summer, residents use skiffs and other boats for travel to Bethel and other nearby villages. Snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles provide transportation during winter. There is a state-owned, public-use seaplane base and a public-use airport with a gravel airstrip.

Source: State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development Community Database

EPA Region 10's Commitment to Federally Recognized Tribes

EPA Region 10 is committed to helping tribes strengthen their abilities to manage environmental programs in Indian country, and to ensure that tribes have a voice in decisions that affect their land, air and water. Region 10 serves 271 federally recognized tribes in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

The goal of the EPA IGAP grant program is to assist tribes and intertribal consortia in developing the capacity to manage their own environmental protection programs, and to develop and implement solid and hazardous waste programs in accordance with individual tribal needs and applicable federal laws and regulations.

<http://www2.epa.gov/tribal/region-10-tribal-program>

<http://www2.epa.gov/tribal/indian-environmental-general-assistance-program-gap>

For More Information

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