

Successful DoD – Tribal Partnership



AROOSTOOK BAND OF MICMAC INDIANS OF MAINE: LORING DEFENSE AREA HOUSING SITE (CONNOR HOUSING AREA)

The Aroostook Band of Micmac Indians (Tribe) became a partner in the Department of Defense-supported Native American Lands Environmental Mitigation Program (NALEMP) in 2009 in order to address health concerns of Tribal members residing at the Loring Defense Area Housing Site regarding lead-based paint (LBP). The Loring Defense Housing Site, also known as the Connor Housing Area, is located in Connor, Maine. Connor is located 10 miles northwest of the former Loring Air Force Base and 3 miles north of Caribou. The site was utilized periodically as off-base housing for Loring Air Force Base personnel from 1953 until 1994, when the base was closed due to the Base Realignment and Closure Act. The housing units were transferred to the Tribe in October 1998 to use as residential housing for low - income tribal families and elders. The tribe experienced a housing shortage at that time.

The Connor Housing Area is comprised of 16 ranch style housing units, one utility building, and a sewage treatment plant. Prior to the transfer of the units to the Tribe, the U.S. Air Force transferred the buildings to the U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior), the Air Force notified Interior about the lead-based paint within the housing units. Documents regarding the transfer to the Tribe included notice of the presence of the LBP, but did not include clear recommendations regarding regular maintenance necessary to keep the units safe for residential use. In 1994, an Environmental Baseline Survey commissioned by the U.S. Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence found significant concentrations of degraded LBP in the interior and exterior paint of the housing units. Occupancy left tribal members regularly exposed to LBP, which is considered a direct health risk. Tribal residents expressed fear that the food grown in the subsistence gardens outside of the housing units could be contaminated, so residents ceased to use the gardens at full capacity. In addition, the full value of the property could not be used as collateral in obtaining loans pending remediation of the lead, which inhibited the Tribe's ability to leverage resources to support other important projects.

With oversight from United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), New England District, the Tribe developed a Strategic Project Implementation Plan (SPIP) for abatement of lead-based paint from the 16 housing units. The Tribe conducted Lead Smart training for Tribal program staff, sampled and analyzed the housing units and surrounding soil for lead contamination, and documented results as well as health and safety records of tribal residents. The Tribe replaced the exterior trim and façade, installed exterior siding to encapsulate lead on the exterior surfaces, removed and replaced door frames, and encapsulated interior garage surfaces and asbestos floor tiles. The Tribe properly disposed of the debris of the renovation activities in accordance with local, state, and federal guidelines. The Tribe also leveraged funding to install a septic system to serve each unit.

Completed renovation work led by the Tribe removed lead-based paint hazards, reduced the health risks to housing residents, helped enable the Tribe to leverage financial resources for other projects, and gave tribal residents the peace of mind they needed to resume full use of the subsistence gardens.