



Media Release

06 December 2006

ABORIGINAL KIDS DIE AS ROLL-OUT DRIES UP

The nation's peak Aboriginal health group has called the federal and Northern Territory governments "complacent, lazy and incompetent" about the roll-out of Opal petrol to remote communities and warned of many more 'petrol sniffing' deaths unless they got serious about the issue.

NACCHO Chairperson, Henry Councillor, said it was ludicrous that the Northern Territory's health department had blamed "logistics" for preventing the roll-out of Opal (non-sniffable) fuel to Oenpelli, where two teenagers died this week.

"By the health department's own admission, Opal fuel was delivered six months ago to Oenpelli but it wasn't hooked up to a bowser so people could buy it — it's absurd and it's tragic," Mr Councillor said from Broome today.

"The federal government really has to take the lead with this Opal roll-out or we'll be seeing plenty more tragedies like the one in Oenpelli."

Mr Councillor said the statistics relating to 'petrol sniffing' deaths were vastly under-reported as death certificates do not always give a full reason for the cause of death and do not include such incidents as suicide or traffic accidents.

"The cause of death is often recorded as 'respiratory failure', 'burns', 'cerebral abscess', 'infections', 'suicide' or 'cardiac arrest' when, in fact, the death was directly attributable to petrol sniffing," he said.

"There's been dozens of reports into petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities and they all say the same thing — Opal roll-out, petrol supply reductions, resources, youth services, counselling and safe houses.

"The federal government must start treating this calamity with the seriousness it deserves or more of our young people will be killed or permanently impaired!"

Interviews and enquiries:

Henry Councillor
Peter Bonner

NACCHO Chairperson
NACCHO Media

0419929422
0407000592