North Dakota has seven power plants, ranking 14th in the Nation for mercury emissions, 20th in sulfur dioxide emissions, and 25th in nitrogen oxide emissions. On the Fort Berthold reservation an increase in these numbers is soon to take place. Tribal council representatives are working on a plan to develop a petroleum refinery to improve the economy and widen employment opportunities.

By building another power plant, we’d be adding to the health issues that already exist. This power plant would be emitting over 600 toxic chemicals into the environment. According to cleartheair.com, power plant pollution increases the risk of heart attacks, cancer, asthma and birth defects, as well as an increase in weather catastrophes. Carbon Dioxide emissions can cause the temperature to rise by 4 degrees, causing heat waves, droughts and flooding.

Children have a 40 percent increased risk of respiratory death and a 26 percent increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. According to the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA), the National Education Association (NEA) and the Arc of the United States young children, infants and developing fetuses’ learning potential is affected by Mercury pollution. These are important facts for members of the Fort Berthold tribal members to consider.

Jody White, spokesperson for the Environmental Awareness Committee of Fort Berthold, was a speaker during a community meeting. She attended to inform everyone on how the chemicals that would be emitted from the power plant would affect the community, and the diseases that are caused by them.

The chemicals, mercury and carbon dioxide help cause cancer and birth defects in unborn children. While Jody was in the middle of a sentence the microphone was shut off and she was told to go sit down. The people that were voting for the power plant were getting angry about what she had to say.

All they are thinking about is the money and about what the money will get them, what they are not thinking about is the people who live near the area and how it will affect their health. When the older ones who want this power plant pass on, the children are the ones who will be left with the power plant. They’ll have to grow up breathing in the air that contains harmful chemicals.

One thing is for sure, tribal members of Fort Berthold need to educate the public, and make informed decisions on this issue. To decide for yourself if you think health is more important than money, visit http://www.ejcc.org.