



## Navajo Nation Council - Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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Legislative Building #3, which is the Navajo Nation Council Delegates' Office, is temporarily closed due to an electrical fire that occurred on Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2008. The fire forced the closure of the building and displaced office staff that were preparing for the upcoming Council Winter Session on Jan. 28. (Photo by Joshua Lavar Butler)

### **Electrical fire in Council Delegates' Office disrupts Legislative Branch activity**

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – The Office of the Speaker is informing the public that Legislative Building #3, which is the Council Delegates' Office, is temporarily closed due to an electrical fire that occurred on Wednesday, January 16, 2008.

The fire forced the closure of the building on Wednesday, Jan 16 for an indefinite period, while personnel from the Navajo Nation Risk Management Office, Safety and Loss Program, and the Fire Department complete their full assessment of the damages and dangers of the incident. These agencies ordered a full immediate closure of this building.

According to a report from Lorenzo Morgan-Long, Office Assistant with the Council Delegates' Office, the incident occurred at 9:45 a.m. on Wednesday when a gulf of smoke filled the office, causing obstruction to the visibility of employees. The electrical fire caused a foul toxic odor, which if inhaled for an extended period of time can be dangerous. Luckily, no injuries were reported.

The electrical fire was attributed to a surge protector that briefly caught fire. The building was immediately evacuated by staff while quick-thinking staff doused the fire with retardant before the fire could spread throughout the building. The fire could have easily spread to the nearby crowded legislative buildings. It was only a matter of seconds before the situation would have become uncontrollable.

Dr. James Davis, Jr., Chief of Staff with the Office of the Speaker, is highly discouraging people from entering or using Legislative Building #3 until we have received proper clearances from the appropriate authorities. "This site restriction must be observed

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and practiced for the safety of all people," he said.

Once the building has been cleared and reopened to the public, The Office of the Speaker will notify everyone in writing.

The fire disrupts the activity of the Legislative Branch, office staff are now working quickly to regroup and assemble materials for the upcoming 2008 Winter Session that is scheduled to begin on Jan. 28.

The daily operation of the Council Delegates' Office will continue during this period, office personnel have moved to temporary worksites within the Office of Legislative Services. To contact the staff at the Council Delegates' Office, call 928-871-7254 or 7230.

This incident raises the concern of the age and inefficiency of these modular buildings that are more than 30-years-old. The 1970s buildings have served its purpose and have definitely outgrown its need. The old modular buildings struggle to accommodate 21<sup>st</sup> century technology.

The office is far too small to house the 88 Council Delegates and staff. Council Delegates share six work stations, with as many as ten Delegates finding themselves displaced and having to find room to do their work.

This is not to mention the staff that have no choice to share office space and cubicles that are meant to be used by one person. Instead, staff find themselves crammed into 6x6 cubicles with more than one person.

Other offices and departments are experiencing the exact same problems of overcrowding, which creates dangerous working conditions. Storage space has also become a lingering problem, as hallways have become storage space for archived files and other needed materials.

Conference rooms have now been sectioned into cubicles for staff, which creates a problem when meeting space is needed. Conference rooms are in short supply at the Legislative Branch.

These concerns definitely increase the need for a new Legislative Branch complex, which is luckily in the planning stages right now. The Office of the Speaker is currently working on plans to construct a new Legislative Complex to house all Legislative Branch programs and offices. With the land withdrawn and all necessary steps taken, it is only a matter of time before this much needed building will be constructed.

The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan (Iyanbito/Pinedale) has taken the leading role on behalf of the 21<sup>st</sup> Navajo Nation Council in finding funding sources for the Legislative Complex project.

The proposed building will be a four-level complex that will house a new state-of-the-art Council Chambers, office space for all 88 Council Delegates, space for the Office of Legislative Services, Office of Legislative Counsel, Office of the Speaker, and for all other related programs operating under the administration of the Legislative Branch.

The existing historic Council Chambers will be made into a museum and is currently being restored to serve as the pinnacle of the Navajo Nation government - a museum to be enjoyed by everyone.

Until the building is constructed, the Legislative Branch is struggling to continue its daily operations in the aged modular buildings. The modular buildings have become an endless money pit, as funds are often directed to its daily maintenance problems.

For additional information, contact Joshua Lavar Butler with the Office of the Speaker at 928-871-6384.