

Federal money spent on booze

By Jean Kizer

The Associated Press

JUNEAU — An investigation by Alaska State Troopers has revealed that three former members of the community council in Platinum, a village in western Alaska, may have improperly spent \$16,000 in state revenue-sharing money to buy liquor and fly it into the remote village.

State Chief Prosecutor Dan Hickey, troopers and top officials of the state Department of Community and Regional Affairs on Monday confirmed that an investigation is under way and may lead to criminal charges.

Troopers said the people under investigation recently were replaced on the council of Platinum, a village of about 60 year-round residents. And one newly elected council member, Doug Ricketts, says a majority of the council wants "to get the village to go dry" by voting to ban liquor.

"That's basically been our problem. They used the money to drink," instead of paying the village's power bills, Ricketts said.

Although there are no liquor stores in Platinum, liquor often is flown in from Dillingham. There are no roads to Platinum, which is located on the Bering Sea coast about 120 miles west of Dillingham and 120 miles south of Bethel.

Trooper Sgt. Paul Harris, who traveled to Platinum to inspect village records, said he is to meet next week with attorneys in the state's Office of Special Prosecutions to discuss the investigation.

Harris said troopers have copies of some checks written on the village checking account by former council members to a liquor store in Dillingham. Other checks allegedly were written to charter airplanes, and possibly for other improper purposes, he said.

"We're talking about, as far as I have been able to determine, 12 or 15 questionable checks," he said. Although there were initial reports that a larger sum might have been improperly spent, Harris said he believes the figure is "closer to" \$16,000.