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ASNA Protests Remote Area Nuclear Blasts

The Arctic Slope Native Association has fired strong protests against announced plans by the Atomic Energy Commission to conduct underground atomic tests in Alaska, possibly in the Brooks Range east of Pt. Lay.

Hugh Nicholls, executive director of ASNA, told the Tundra Times strong protests

(Continued on Page 4)

Nuclear Blasts . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

had been sent to the President of the United States, Alaska's congressional delegation, BIA Commissioner Bennett, and the chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Nicholls said that the indicated testing area is in one of the prime hunting areas of the Eskimo people. The area is also under a blanket claim by the Arctic Slope Native Association.

The ASNA director said, "The AEC points out they won't test in a wildlife range, and we feel people should get just as much consideration."

"We will fight this proposal with every legal means, because arbitrary action by government where the public is concerned is not one of the principals embodied in the constitution," Nicholls stated.

"Such actions are not to be condoned or tolerated unless we propose to forego all such rights to our own default," Nicholls stated.

News of their plans for a new underground testing located in Alaska was finally released by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) last week after being pressed by the Anchorage Times.

The news broke a little over two months after efforts by

Fairbanks' Jessen's Weekly to smoke out the AEC spokesman last week said testing and drilling crews were already at work on Amchitka Island in the Aleutians to determine if the island was suitable for tests.

Amchitka was the site of an 80 kiloton underground atomic detonation in October, 1965, and at that time Defense Department officials emphasized that there would be only one nuclear blast there and no more.

An AEC spokesman said they were seeking test site locations with suitable geology, where certain tests can be conducted with a minimum of local disturbance.

If Amchitka is not found suitable for the testing program the AEC will then investigate other areas of far northern Alaska, specifically many miles east of Pt. Lay. In this connection, the AEC stressed that the federal Arctic Wildlife Range would be excluded from this survey.

However, Sen. Ernest Gruening's comments indicated the plans of the AEC might be a little more extensive. He told the Anchorage Times testing would start in Alaska in various places, including Am-

chitka and some still undesignated places in the far north—probably some place in the Brooks Range.

The Atomic Energy Commission and the idea of atomic testing are not new in far northwest Alaska and to the Eskimo people. In 1959 the AEC planned "Project Chariot," which proposed blasting a harbor at Cape Thompson not far from Pt. Hope.

The project generated such controversy and opposition from conservationists, biologists, and the Eskimo people of the northwest that "Project Chariot" was deferred.

As a result of Russian atomic tests the radiation level in the Arctic is already high, and the radiation count in the Eskimo people is the highest in the nation. In 1963, Sen. E.L. (Bob) Bartlett became concerned with the problem and pushed for special studies and steps concerning the problem.

At that time Bartlett said that the facts seemed clear and irrefutable that the Eskimos and Indians are receiving several times more strontium-90 and cesium-137 into their

systems than are American citizens of more temperate climates.

In September of 1963 the people at Anaktuvuk Pass were found to have one of the highest average levels due to their almost exclusive diet on lichen eating caribou.

The Eskimo peoples concern and awareness of the meaning of atomic tests and radiation were expressed by Simon Paneak, President of the Anaktuvuk village council: "Our people are worried about radiation. If the radiation gets higher, we don't know what we are going to do."

The problem with radiation in the Arctic centers in the unique food chain—lichen, caribou, people.

Unlike most plants lichen takes its water and nutrients from the atmosphere, and thus absorbs fallout materials and has proven to be heavily contaminated.

The Eskimo and Indian people depend heavily on caribou for their food, and in many areas the marrow of the bone is considered a delicacy. Radiation levels are more heavily absorbed in the marrow and are passed on to the people.

Biological studies surrounding "Project Chariot" also created controversy, including the firing of one scientist who maintained that there was a danger from radiation from the atomic tests in the Arctic on the food chain.

Dr. William A. Pruitt Jr., who conducted studies for the University of Alaska under an AEC grant, charged that his work was altered and was later dismissed from the University.

Project Chariot was later discarded and in 1963 the land withdrawal was dropped in the Cape Thompson area.

The main concern over the proposed underground shots is with "venting" of the blasts to the surface. It is known that in Nevada that breaks through to the surface frequently release radiation. The question remains as to how serious the threat would be in an area which already has radiation problems affecting humans?

Flore Lekanof, Chairman of the Federation of Native Associations, told the Tundra Times that all possible information concerning AEC plans

(Continued on Page 6)

Nuclear Blasts

(Continued from Page 4)

should be furnished to the FNA board.

"We should be given all information on Amchitka, the effects of the last blast, and also frequency of "venting" at the Nevada test site," he said. "What we need right now is information."

Lekanof indicated that the proposed testing would be brought up at the coming meeting of the association's board, and that they would probably request cooperation from the AEC for accurate information.

He also pointed out that a good deal of all possible test sites are tied up in native claims and that the AEC may have to deal with the native people. The chairman also pointed out the especially hazardous situation in radiation high Arctic regions.

In Juneau, Gov. Walter J. Hickel told the Tundra Times he had been briefed about the project some 10 days before.

"I think in the event the Atomic Energy Commission decided to use Amchitka Island we should go along with the project," Hickel said. "It will not endanger any area of Alaska."

A representative of the Alaska Conservation Society said they would like more details of what the AEC has mind. They pointed out that they had been informed that the Amchitka blast in October, 1965 was to be a one shot deal.