

FUEL SHORTAGE HITS BUSH

Rural Development, Village Electrification Endangered By Crisis

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Economic development in rural areas of Alaska is seriously threatened by the national energy crisis and the fuel allocation proposals which are believed to become implemented in Alaska during January. If fuel allocations restrict fuel usage for electric power to current

levels in Alaska, energy production in rural areas will not be sufficient to continue the program of bringing power to non-electrified villages.

Projects requiring additional power production, such as new development funded by regional Native corporations from payments received under the Native claims settlement act, are also endangered.

Average consumption of power by consumers in rural areas is so low, only 100 kilowatt hours per month or about one-sixth of the national average, that internal growth experienced by villages as well as power requirements of new education facilities would not receive adequate power supplies if energy production is not increased.

During an interview with the Tundra Times in which he discussed the potential impact of the energy crisis in the bush, Alaska Village Electric Cooperative general manager Lloyd Hodson said, "It is a threat to the entire economic development in the rural areas of Alaska. I am very much concerned.

"Every Native organization in the state, anyone developing eco-
(Continued on page 6)

Shortage Hits ...

(Continued from page 1)

conomic projects, and especially anyone managing projects developing from Native claims, should be very concerned."

Hodson said that if energy production is not allowed to increase in rural areas, many villages may have to continue without any source of electrical power at all. "We estimate that up to 125 villages, each with a population of from 25 to 200 persons, do not have electricity yet, he said.

Fuel rationing would have a tremendously adverse effect on Alaska villages, he said.

"Average electrical consumption is so low compared to the lower 48 states. Is it fair to ration electricity to someone who uses only one-sixth of the national average? I say not," he added.

During 1972, AVEC consumed 1.5 million gallons of fuel in village power plants. The figure for 1973 is expected to be higher and, in 1974, AVEC anticipates that it will require 2.6 million gallons of fuel to meet new growth.

It would be very unfair, Hodson said, to hold village power use at the current 100 kilowatt level while, at the same time, the average power use for some states range from 1,000 up to 2,000 kilowatt hours monthly for each household.

"The inequities do exist," he stated.

AVEC, the Rural Alaska Community Action Program, and the Alaska Federation of Natives, Inc. have joined forces to prepare a position paper on behalf of energy users in Alaska villages. Much-needed economic development projects, and the rising standard of living which villages are projected to enjoy, present increased power requirements which are unique to rural Alaska, they contend.

The three organizations presented their case to the Alaska Public Utility Commission during a meeting in Anchorage on Friday. They told the commission that Alaska villages want

equitable treatment on rules which may be developed for fuel allocations.

Cutbacks in air service because of allocations will also have an adverse effect on AVEC operations. "Transportation service reduction will reduce our capability to perform emergency maintenance on facilities," Hodson said.

The full impact of the energy crisis and government rationing is not yet understood, but AVEC and other groups sensitive to rural Alaska power requirements believe that there is great cause for concern.