

# Airwaves quiet as KBRW-AM building burns

Mattie Bodfish is

by Katrina Wade  
Tundra Times staff

In the early morning of October 16, the radios tuned to KBRW 680 AM on the North Slope went silent.

The villages of Atkasuk and Wainwright and camps around Prudoe Bay lost radio reception because of a fire in the transmitter tower building for KBRW-AM radio in Barrow.

"I was on duty before 7 a.m. and saw problems with our audio feedback. The audio manager, Don Rinker, called the airport and told them our tower lights were out," said Jay Marble of KBRW's news department. Don went out to check on the tower and called me later, saying the transmitter building was on fire."

The tower was not damaged, but the transmitter building was destroyed with its two 10,000 watt transmitters (main and a backup) and related electronic gear. An early estimation for the cost of replacing the building and the equipment is \$250,000.

KBRW was just about to start the "gavel to gavel" coverage of the 30th Alaska Federation of Natives Convention when the bad news hit the crew that was in Anchorage for the coverage.

"We were going to send our engineer up, but (Rinker) called back and said not to bother," said Steve Hamlin, assistant general manager for KBRW

and the editor of the AFN coverage.

"We have no idea what caused the fire, but the whole building was electrical. It was purely an accidental fire," said Barrow Fire Chief Tom Opie.

"Plans for rebuilding are already underway. While nothing is certain, Don is already making calls around, looking for equipment," said Marble.

The transmitter plant will be rebuilt in four stages according to Rinker. The first stage will be to install a new, full power 10 kilowatt transmitter with minimal operating equipment. A temporary building will house the transmitter. A new transmitter has already been located at the manufacturer in Bangor, Maine.

The second stage includes the construction of a new transmitter building which has not yet been designed.

During the third stage, the temporary transmitter and all the equipment needed to bring KBRW back to full power will be installed. The new transmitter will then be installed into the new transmitter building.

The last stage will be the removal of the standby transmitter from service and to turn on the new main transmitter. The timeline for the operation is to be back on air with the new transmitter by Thanksgiving.

"We are working almost around the clock to make this timeline. Everyone is working really hard," Rinker said.

Funding for the project will come

partially from insurance, but some of the funds will have to be raised through the traditional fund drive.

If you wish to make a donation, contact KBRW at PO Box 109, Barrow, AK 99723 or call 1-800-478-KBRW in Alaska or (907) 852-6811.