

'Spit Out' promotes life without tobacco

"The Great Alaska Spit Out" is a statewide campaign by health officials to encourage youth not to smoke cigarettes or use smokeless tobacco.

Health officials held a poster and essay contest in April for youth in grades kindergarten through 12. The poster part of the contest was for kindergarten through sixth grade and the essay contest was for those seven to 12th grade.

The five essay contest winners are as follows:

Kam G. Cianfrani, grade seven, of St. Mary's; Connie Andy, grade 12, of Newtok; Melissa Jimmie, grade 10, Julie Cronk, grade 11, and Clayton Sam, grade 11, all of Northway.

These top five winners were awarded \$25 each as well as a free trip to Washington, D.C., to meet with the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and present their essays to him. They also will carry the



responsibility for a school and/or community project pertaining to tobacco use.

The top five winners from the poster contest were Lanora Paul, grade three, of Tanacross; Keith Dunn, grade five, of Teller; Terra Malamute, grade six, of Galena; David Deacon, kindergarten, of Grayling; and Brian Pushruk, grade four, of Teller.

Poster contest winners each won \$10.

The surgeon general's report on smokeless tobacco outlines the hazardous health effects of smokeless tobacco including increased risk of cancer, development of leukoplakia, gingival recession, nicotine addiction and a contributory role in coronary artery and peripheral vascular disease, hypertension, peptic ulcers and increased fetal mortality and morbidity.

The use of smokeless tobacco is high in Alaska Native school children. A statewide self-administered survey on smokeless tobacco usage was conducted in the spring of 1986.

The sample included a total of 4,965 Alaska Native school children. It was reported that 34 percent of the males age 5 to 18 years and 28 percent of the females age 5 to 18 years used smokeless tobacco products.

The early age of initiation — about

16 percent of the 5-year-olds used these products — and the known health risks of smokeless tobacco indicate a potential health problem.

The evidence demonstrating increased morbidity and mortality related to cigarette smoking is conclusive. It has been reported that about 50 percent of the adult Native population — over 18 — smoke cigarettes.

Data from a survey of five villages in the Northwest region indicated that 56 percent of the adults smoked. Of the 216 children in grades K-3, 8 percent have tried smoking, one-third of them often.

Of the 161 children surveyed in grades four to six, 10 percent reported smoking, with girls smoking as much as boys. Of the 319 seventh to 12th graders, 41 percent reported smoking, with girls exceeding boys' rates of smoking.