

# Kotzebue to vote on alcohol ban May 15

KOTZEBUE (AP) — In response to a petition drive by local residents, the Kotzebue City Council has scheduled a special election May 15 to decide whether to ban the sale and import of alcohol.

If the ban is approved, Kotzebue would become the largest community in Alaska where both import and sale are prohibited. Bethel and Barrow ban the sale of alcohol, but residents can bring it into town for private consumption.

The council's action last week was a mere formality, as the petition drive had gathered about 140 signatures, more than enough to force a vote on the question.

Although no organization specifically sponsored the petition drive, the Kotzebue Elders have been the most vocal in pointing out problems caused by alcohol.

No one voiced outright opposition to the ban at the council meeting, but several

people raised concerns over the potential loss of revenue to the city, and whether the ban can be enforced.

Last year, the six licensed liquor outlets in Kotzebue had sales of about \$3 million. That meant \$200,000 in sales tax for the city, money earmarked for recreation.

Council member Jeff Hadley said he doubted the ban could be enforced. Police Chief Don Buehler said success would depend on community support.

He said if people cover up for their neighbors, there will be no way his department can control the problem.

But Chuck Winkle, a member of the Alcohol Beverage Board, a local advisory panel, said there was no choice but to ban alcohol.

He said 80-90 percent of the police calls in the community of about 3,000 residents are alcohol related, and he referred to the unusually high suicide rate in the area.

"The issue is death, and there should be no compromise where deaths are involved," Winkle said.

Hadley said he thinks some recent suicides in neighboring villages might actually have been caused by prohibition laws because victims felt guilty about violating them.

All of the villages in the NANA region already have banned the sale and importation of alcohol.