

Bethel suffers power failure

Gov. Jay Hammond Was Orating as Village Power Abruptly Failed

By LAEL MORGAN

Since early last fall Bethel citizens have been planning ceremony and celebration for the long-pending visit of Gov. Jay Hammond, but no one expected it would be quite as memorable an event as it was.

"Hammond was giving a speech when everything just blew all to Hell!" recounts astonished Bethel Mayor, Eddie Hoffman. "A fuel line had broken at the power plant and splattered all around, catching fire. The building burned down.

That was Dec. 2 when temperatures were relatively mild for Western Alaska, but this week they plummeted to -30 below zero and Bethel's problems have become critical.

At this writing Bethel representatives are meeting with government agencies in Anchorage seeking help, but many fear the town won't be able to generate full power for a long time to come.

Currently Bethel is running on two 900 kilowatt generators flown in immediately after the accident on loan from Alyeska Pipeline Company.

The capacity of the old plant was 5,500 kilowatts which

leaves the community with a severe power shortage.

"The Bethel Hospital blew up one of its standby generators and is flying in an emergency unit," Hoffman reports. "FAA (The Federal Aviation Agency) is on its own but pretty shaky for power, too, we understand. Northern Commercial ran a cable to keep the grade school temperature up but school has been closed here. May open tomorrow."

The airport runway lights were down for a while and citizens lined up car headlights for night landings. Today that's no longer necessary Hoffman said.

Another plus is the Bethel Native Corporation which protected its major investment, a handsome hotel-apartment

(Continued on Page 6)

Bethel Power Fails . . .

(Continued from Page 1)

complex, by flying in a new generator the very night of the fire.

"It's a 150 kilowatt and it saved our necks," Hoffman, corporation president, said. "Not everybody was so lucky."

Hardest hit was the ill-fated 200-unit housing development, Bethel Heights, which originally cost about \$3.9 million to build and plumb and, since the late 1960s, about \$4 million in repair.

"We hear it has a million dollars in losses this week. . . . Everything is frozen up there. The main line, sewer system, everything," Hoffman worries.

But, for the most part, people have remained in their homes rather than move to the National Guard Armory as is usual in an emergency.

"It's pretty rough around here," the mayor concluded. "But we're holding our own."