

Telecommunications Being Negotiated in Washington

Negotiations are being conducted in Washington D.C. this week between the State Office of Telecommunications and RCA regarding a recently released Response to Comments of the already proposed RCA plan for statewide satellite communications.

Informed sources say that the negotiations have reached final stages and that at least 100 rural communities will receive emergency medical satellite communications links this summer with another 100 the following year.

"We're withholding any comments until after they are through negotiating," said Sam Kito, executive vice president of Doyon Ltd. and proponent of satellite communications. "We are encouraged but we don't want to jeopardize the meetings in Washington, D.C."

The new plan is not believed to

be acceptable to the state but apparently it represents something to negotiate from. When contacted by the Tundra Times, Marvin Weatherly, director for the state Office of Telecommunications, indicated that the state is not closing the door to other plans but only establishing the basic communication system to be built upon later.

"We will still explore alternative systems," he added. "No one will get a lock on Alaska communication."

Villages without any communications will get priority on the new communications development program, which will be a five channel system when completely set up. Originally it was indicated it may include only one emergency medical channel to be expanded to television, telephone and other uses as time becomes available on the satellite.

"We're going to get medical communications in those villages even if the State of Alaska has to go into business itself to deliver it," Weatherly said.

So far the state and RCA have agreed to form an Alaska-RCA technical planning and monitoring team to give direction and control to communications development. Weatherly indicated that such a group would insure that anything promised would be followed up with action, as well as assisting RCA or whatever other communication service companies which come into the business here.

In essence, this means that the original cluster concept which RCA originally suggested will probably be eliminated altogether.