

# Nanwalek goes dry with local option vote

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by Mike Hinman  
for the *Tundra***TIMES**

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Nanwalek has become the first community in the Cook Inlet area to ban sale, importation and possession of alcohol under the state's 1981 Local Option Law.

According to Bob Aiken with the Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs, Nanwalek became the 27th village to enact such a ban.

A total of 92 ballots were mailed to Nanwalek, with 60 returned and seven invalidated, according to Gail Senumiai of the Division of Elections in Juneau. Of the seven invalidated ballots, one was missing a voter signature, and six were not properly witnessed, she said.

While the village has no bars or liquor stores, liquor is shipped in from Homer or Soldotna. Several deaths have occurred over the past several years due to alcohol particularly accidental drownings, according to Nanwalek village chief Vincent Kvasnikoff.

"It's good for the village," said

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Kvasnikoff. "Drinking by kids was getting out of control."

Some are not comfortable with the one vote margin, and it is expected to come up for a new vote at the end of a mandatory waiting period. Kvasnikoff expects a greater turnout the next time it comes up for a vote, with the possibility of reverting to a "damp" village, allowing possession, but not the sale or importation, of alcohol. There are 77 other communities in Alaska that are "damp."

The low voter turnout and the invalidated votes affects the feeling in the village toward the new law. "That's why we weren't too comfortable, with that one vote," he said.

The enforcement of the new law will be handled jointly by a village public

safety officer (VPSO) and the Alaska State Troopers.

"We just hired (Roy Evans) here a few days ago," said Kvasnikoff.

Evans already has the training required for a VPSO, saving the village six weeks of training and education time. The village plans an educational period to inform residents and air taxis on the regulations and penalties.

"You know (education) doesn't happen overnight," said Kvasnikoff. "We'll have to tell them, spread the news."

The state's local option law was amended several times, most notably, in 1988 when communities were given the ability to vote on a ban of alcohol possession.