

# Louden Village Council declares 'environmental disaster'

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Hoping to spur government action, the Loudon Village Council of Galena has passed a resolution declaring lands in the area "an environmental disaster."

The action is directed at an estimated 100,000 55-gallon drums—many containing toxins—abandoned by the military in and around Galena Air Force Base and a nearby defense early warning facility.

The resolution states in part:

"WHEREAS, the Loudon Village Council believes there is an adverse impact upon its cultural and subsistence resources from one hundred thousand unassessed 55 gallon drums strewn across its lands and, further, as they deteriorate are spilling their contents of toxic materials on our land which nurtures our berries, fish, game and ourselves . . .

"NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Loudon Village Council hereby declares that the land surrounding the

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Galena Airport, Campion Air Station, and Kalakaket Creek Dew Line Site is an Environmental Disaster and that immediate steps be taken to limit further damage."

The council action was taken April 11. Earlier this year, the government published reports on each of the three sites that appeared to minimize the risks to humans and the environment of the discarded drums. However, an area near the Galena airport is contaminated by a large quantity of DDT, a strong, persistent pesticide blamed for widespread environmental damage, especially to bird life, before it was banned in the U.S. According to the federal assessment of health risk resulting from the DDT at Galena, "the mean concentration of each chemical is well below the RBC (risk-based concentration) value, indicating no significant risk to workers exposed to these soils during routine construction activities via dermal contact or inhalation of dust (inhalation of vapors does not pose a risk because the chemicals are non-volatile)."

Although the government acknowledges that tests on mice and rats indicate risks of tumors from DDT exposure, the report consistently downplays the risk to humans by stating that data on human risks is unavailable or "inadequate."

While the U.S. Air Force has indicated it will clean up at least a portion of the

drums and contamination that has accumulated in the Galena area since World War II and the Cold War, planners forecast some delay in implementing its preferred approach to dealing with the DDT-contaminated soils near the airport.

Decisions on cleanup of other areas at the Galena airport, at Campion and at Kalakaket are still pending.

The Louden Village Council resolution followed closely on the heels of a report by Greenpeace Alaska on its statewide Community Toxics Investigative and Advocacy Project. The project, a comprehensive computer mapping campaign designed to empower villages to deal effectively with local pollution caused by government and industrial activities, has compiled a data base of more than 3,000 contaminated sites throughout Alaska.

"Many of these sites are in close proximity to more than 200 Native communities where subsistence foods are threatened by toxic substances such as pesticides, PCBs, and dioxin," said a Greenpeace statement.

The U.S. Congress recently passed a measure requiring the Dept. of Interior to prepare a report addressing issues related to the presence of contaminants on lands conveyed or slated for conveyance to Native corporations under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. The report is due in April, 1997.