

AEC Will Consult Natives If Remote Blast Planned

AEC To Test Drill North Slope in April

The Atomic Energy Commission's exploration on the North Slope is only a backup for the Amchitka site, and full public discussions will be held before any testing would be started in that area, said an AEC spokesman.

H.G. Vermillion, Public Information Director of the AEC Nevada Operations office, said that the Commission would start drilling a small test hole this April in the Northern foothills of the Brooks Range, about 50 miles southeast of Point Lay.

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This hole would be dug solely to see if the ground there is suitable for underground nuclear testing. At the same time, several test holes would be dug at Amchitka Island in the Aleutians.

If the Amchitka site is useable, all Alaskan testing would be done there. Reasons for not using a site include water at the bottom of the hole and excessive heat at the bottom of the hole.

The excessive heat is generally a result of volcanic activity. Since Amchitka is in a region of volcanic activity, the North Slope site is being considered as an alternative.

Vermillion said that the atomic tests would be held far underground. Experience with over 200 tests had shown no trouble with radiation reaching the surface when such deep tests were held, he said.

He said, that, in two shallow tests, some radiation was vented to the surface. This consisted mainly of radioactive gases.

Of these gases, only the iodine vapor would be taken into the food supply. In the two cases, the amount of radiation reaching the public in this way was negligible. The heavier elements, such as strontium, were filtered out.

If it looks as though venting would occur, no tests would be run at a site. As a further precaution, he said, no tests would be run when caribou or other animals were close to the test site.

The North Slope was less desirable than Amchitka because of the greater expense of setting up facilities there, Vermillion said. This expense would also ensure that they would limit testing to one small area serviced from one base camp.

The tests would be held to test nuclear warheads for our National defense, he continued. There is no connection with the plan to blast at Cape Thompson; the Cape was not considered for these tests.

The testing program would involve about 350 people full-time, with 600 being present for a nuclear test. Most of those would have to be experts from Outside, but the AEC has had talks with State officials about employing Alaskans.

Vermillion said that the previous test at Amchitka had not disturbed the sea otters there, and a survey of other wildlife had not shown any harm. In one test in Nevada, several cows stood over a deep test without any ill effects.

Nevertheless, he said that the AEC would hold full public discussions with the residents if it decided to test at the North Slope site.