

# RCA Now Plans Installation of Dial Telephones in 142 Villages

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"Literally thousands of people in Alaska have never had a telephone in their hands."

"Such may seem unbelievable to people living in or near urban areas where telephones are practically everywhere, but to RCA the situation is very real—and one that it hopes to change in the near future."

This statement was made by an RCA spokesman who is closely involved in the bush communications program that RCA plans to install when the Alaska Communications System (ACS) is turned over to it.

The \$28.4 million sale was approved last June by President Nixon, subject to authorization by the Federal Communications Commission and the Alaska Public Service Commission. ACS has been owned and operated by the U.S. Air Force since the 1940s.

The FCC tentatively approved the transfer the last of February but withheld final action pending a decision by the state commission. The state commission recently announced that public hearings on the transfer will begin June 29—only two days before RCA is supposed to take over ACS.

The executive director of ACS, Don Hall, said that it will now be impossible for RCA to meet the July 1 date, because following final approval by the state commission, which could take two

months, a minimum of three months is needed for FCC approval.

In the meantime, RCA is putting the finishing touches on a plan to take a dial telephone system to 142 villages in Alaska. Known as the Bush Communications Program, the plan is one part of the \$27.6 million in improvements slated for the present communication system.

Many of the 142 villages currently have no service, while others have only private or government owned equipment, similar to that used for ham radio operations.

Eighty-eight villages were selected by the state and RCA added 54 that could be reached with some addition to the system.

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But how will the system work?

The plan for the bush system begins with 18 villages where telephone systems owned by private companies or municipalities are currently operating. Homing in on the telephone exchanges in these 18 locations, RCA plans to link surrounding villages to them.

The 18 areas are Barrow, Kotzebue, Nome, Fairbanks, Nenana, McGrath, Healy, Bethel, King Salmon, Kodiak, Cordova, Cold Bay, Dillingham, Wrangell, Angoon, Ketchikan, Fort Yukon and Homer.

His genuine interest in the project quite apparent, the RCA spokesman explained that many of the villages to be reached are miles away from one of the 18 existing systems and, he added, it is not feasible to link them by stretching telephone wires across hundreds of miles of often rough, mountainous terrain.

So instead, RCA will use radio waves (very high frequency or micro-wave) to do the job.

These radio waves can be made to perform over a long distance. Plus, the method is not susceptible to interference and is not subject to radio blackouts as occurs frequently with present village radio facilities.

Each village in the program will have a telephone and will share two channels with five to ten other villages nearby. To call another village within the same system, he will dial 110 for long distance.

Incoming calls will go to the village telephone, and, if both channels available to the village are tied up (busy), the caller will hear a busy tone. If not, then the phone will ring. At this point, the village council becomes responsible for the call.

The community will appoint an attendant to collect regular and long distance charges and to fetch people on incoming calls. Also, it is responsible for providing a space for the telephone in a centrally-located or commonly-visited building and for seeing that the equipment is protected.

RCA will not be installing phones in homes in the villages because it is concerned primarily with providing long distance communications. It will link the village to the outside world leaving home installation to a local company or the villagers.

Each month, the village council will receive a bill from RCA for the minimum rate plus a charge for each call over the minimum allowed. In turn, the

council will collect charges from individual users to cover these costs plus enough to pay for an attendant and the electricity necessary to operate the telephone.

The bush system has been estimated to cost in excess of \$3 million. For several years, it will be operating at a loss, but is expected to break even as the rural areas of the state develop.

Already the project has gone out to bidders, and the company hopes to have a contract for installing the system awarded by June 1. Once built, RCA will operate it. Tentative plans call for telephone communications to be extended to 72 of the 142 villages by the end of this year and to all of them within three years.

In light of the enormous costs and special problems of distance and climate encountered in Alaska, why has RCA undertaken such a project?

The principal reason, the RCA spokesman said, is to provide service.

With a population of about 250,000 Alaska has only about 41,000 resident phones. These are mainly in cities and larger communities where numerous services are readily available.

Most of the villages, however, have little or no communications nor do they have the services important to the health and welfare of their people.

The village telephone program is intended to make these services readily available to the bush through reliable communication facilities.

RCA is making an investment in the long range future of Alaska the spokesman added.

"Mining and mineral exploration will take development to the villages, and we want to be prepared for it. Once the network is established, other services will be needed and things will start rolling.

"Demands will grow on the service. And, by providing a means of communication for the villages, we will bring business into them also. This will greatly assist in stimulating employment and other development urgently needed in the remote communities."

Beyond the proposed bush system, there is talk of direct distance dialing in rural Alaska along with satellite communications that will take television to even the most remote areas of the state.