

North Slope gas wells prove successful

BARROW — The first gas wells ever drilled by the North Slope Borough have proven successful, according to Bill Hess, borough public information officer.

He said residents of Barrow can now look forward to a secure supply of natural gas to generate their electricity and heat their homes and offices, possibly well into the next century.

Last summer, Borough Mayor George Ahmaogak learned that existing production from the Barrow Gas Fields would fail to meet community needs during the winter of 1987-88. To address the problem, he launched a low-budget production and exploration drilling program.

"A shortage of natural gas would have hurt every resident of Barrow," Ahmaogak said. "It would have required them to spend more of their hard-earned income for power and heat, leaving them less for fuel and



supplies for subsistence hunting and fishing, for food and clothing, recreation, travel and other essential needs.

"It would similarly have hurt the government of the North Slope Borough, by also increasing our operating costs," he added. "I felt it was critically important to get in and find more gas, and to do it as quickly and efficiently as possible."

Most of the wells now providing gas to Barrow were drilled by the Navy in the '60s and early '70s, before Congress turned the gas fields over to the

North Slope Borough in 1984.

Production from those wells, located in the south and east Barrow Gas Fields, has been declining.

Making matters worse was the fact that when a well goes into decline, it has to be worked harder. This pulls water up into the well shaft, where it freezes. Production of the well is cut even more drastically.

Ahmaogak was faced with the options of turning to diesel fuel, exploring the more distant and promising — but expensive — Walakpa prospect at costs exceeding \$200 million or attempting to increase production of the Barrow Gas Fields.

Last winter, the mayor got approval from the NSB Assembly to launch a \$10 million project to drill wells in the Barrow Gas Fields.

While final conclusions cannot yet be made on the two exploratory wells, both struck gas, and initial results look

extremely encouraging. If current indications hold up, the new field should support about seven wells and will boost supplies well into the next century.

Ahmaogak said he was pleased with the results so far, and he noted that he has secured a \$500,000 state grant to explore the possibilities of producing gas for the villages of Atkasuk, Nuiqsut and Wainwright.

"Another \$800,000 program is exploring the use of our abundant North Slope coal reserves to lower heating and electrical costs in Point Hope, Point Lay and Wainwright," he said. "We are also looking at potential alternative low-cost fuel sources for Anaktuvuk Pass and Kaktovik."

He also pointed out that his administration is committed to solving the problem of North Slope residents having to pay "the highest energy prices of any group of consumers in the nation," despite vast energy resources in the area.