



*Anton Avdeenko arrives in Anchorage Wednesday on his way to Galveston, Texas, where he will be treated for burns.*

## 'A call for help'

# Soviet boy to be treated in U.S.

by Soren Wuerth  
for the Tundra Times

A seriously burned 8-year-old Soviet boy was transported across the Bering Strait Wednesday from Magadan to Galveston, Texas, in the first emergency medical rescue of its kind between the United States and the USSR.

Anton Avdeenko suffered third-

degree burns on 33 percent of his body, including his head, left hand and buttocks — after he accidentally caught aflame Sept. 17 while playing with fuel near a fire.

As his condition deteriorated, Magadan doctors decided to contact Ted Mala, the director of the Institute for Circumpolar Health Studies at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Mala

and a group of nurses from Providence Hospital in Anchorage left Tuesday.

"Complications set in when they were treating the boy, and they couldn't handle them locally," Mala said. "Essentially it was a call for help from our neighbors."

Avdeenko's condition worsened slightly while flying to Anchorage.

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Mala said.

"But he looks like he's got a lot of spunk. He asked for his teddy bear during the flight," Mala said.

Oates said Avdeenko will be admitted into the Shriners Hospital in Galveston. Doctors who have diagnosed his case say Avdeenko has a 90 percent chance of living, she said.

The hospital has a small, but specialized, free-care burn unit, Oates said.

The flight to Magadan alone cost about \$35,000, according to Janet Oates, the community relations director for Providence Hospital.

But the organizers of the trip — ICHS and Providence Hospital — seemed unsure who would pay for it.

Mala said the Port of Magadan would pay for part of the medivac costs, but Oates said Providence would pick up the tab for half the trip, and Rocky Mountain Helicopters Inc., which conducted the transport, would pay for the other half. The Provo, Utah, based company operates Providence Hospital's LifeGuard Alaska.

When asked about the discrepancy, Mala said the financial aspects hadn't been worked out yet.

The rescue came only five days after Mala warned Alaskan and Soviet authorities during an international meeting that an accident could occur "tomorrow" and no intergovernmental emergency plan is in place.

At the Bering Emergency Medical Services Committee meeting, held in Anchorage at UAA, Mala said too much bureaucracy stands in the way of rapid communication between the two countries in the event of an emergency.

Also, permission for either country to cross the border between rural areas



Photo by Susan Wapner

*Remigiys Kabychyus, Soviet attache, left, and Ted Mala discuss U.S.-Soviet search and rescue at a recent meeting.*

in Alaska and the Soviet Far East — the Bering Sea region — must be acquired first from Juneau and Petropavlovsk.

It took two days to arrange visa-free travel for Avdeenko, said Oates.

"That is a long time when we're talking about a human life," she said.

But the medivac team passed through the border without complication, Mala said. "Customs and emigration officials said, 'Just go by,'" said Mala.

The Bering EMS Committee first met Aug. 23 to discuss joint rescue operations and the impact of visa-free traveling and tourism. The Sept. 21 meeting was held to discuss emergency medical evacuations and search and rescue.

The second gathering ended with little resolved, other than a request by Soviet dignitaries for the United States to draft a protocol for their approval.

"We don't expect any documents signed here or an agreement," said

Remigiys Kabychyus, Soviet attache. "We must look into the issue deeply and thoroughly before we sign anything. Currently, there is not a protocol to the existing treaty."

But the week's development is an example of the need for a coordinated search and rescue and emergency medivac operation between Alaska and the Soviet Union, Mala said.

"This is a model for other exchanges. We didn't plan to do this," Mala said. "This is a humanitarian effort."