

Safe water systems expanding into more villages

Slowly but surely, safe and convenient water for home use is becoming available in Alaska's rural areas as funds are made available for capital improvements projects. Almost every two years the legislature authorizes the sale of bonds for voter approval. Sale of the bonds finance construction of water and sewer projects in both incorporated and unincorporated communities with populations of between 25 and 600 people.

In second class or the small unincorporated communities, 100% funding is administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation's Village Safe Water Program. The funds are most often used to construct a central facility with showers, laundry and sewage disposal services, as well as a place to get potable water to take home.

DEC works closely with the 12 regional health corporations to identify communities most in

need of sanitation improvements. Communities recommended by the health corporations are screened and consolidated into a priority list which, along with detailed background information, is submitted to the Legislature every two years for inclusion into a bond proposition. If voter approval is secured, funds are made available for new projects.

In 1978, the sale of bonds provided a watering point to the village of Kotlik. Up to this time residents were using river and rain water, or melted ice, all of which are unprotected from contamination for drinking purposes.

In Kotlik, as in all Village Safe Water projects, the department staff works closely with the village council to determine what type of project the village needs, given budget constraints and operation and maintenance considerations such as fuel and labor costs. A contract was written with the village, engineering design completed, materials ordered, a local work force hired and construction started. The amount of time required to complete any a project depends upon the size and complexity of the proposed improvements.

In December 1979 a meeting

was held to determine the best solution to Kotlik's water problems. The city council and the Village Safe Water staff concluded the best idea made use of the Lower Yukon School District's existing water treatment system. Funds were made available to the school district to purchase a larger storage tank. In return, a watering point adjacent to the school would be provided for residents of Kotlik. This solution furnished the village and school with a dependable and safe water supply. The key element in the success of this project was the close cooperation which evolved between the village, the school district and the department.

The project design was completed in September 1980. Supplies were airlifted shortly afterwards. Among the local work force was Wille Odinzoff, plumber; George Costley, electrician; Peter Yunak, Felix Aketachunak and Michael Akaran, carpenters; and Agatha Mike and Debra Costley as painters. Also employed were Lawrence Chiklak, Al Wasuli and Miguel Bordeaux. Work was inspected and approved on Nov. 10, 1980.

There were other Village Safe Water projects in Alakanuk, Nulato, Selawik, Chevak, Pitkas

Point, Tanana, Beaver, Northway, Koyukuk and Council.

In Hooper Bay a distribution system was built so residents could obtain drinking water almost at their doorsteps during the summer months. At Shaktoolik, a watering point was built which enables residents to obtain water regardless of the weather. Improvements are also under way with Village Safe Water assistance in about a dozen other communities.