

AkPIRG works hard for rural Alaska

Dear Editor:

Many people do not realize that AkPIRG, Alaska Public Interest Research Group, Inc., is hard at work on many problems of importance to rural Alaskans. Lead by Aleut activist JoAnn Holmes, the only indigenous director of any Public Interest Research Group in the United States, AkPIRG is taking on some of the toughest problems confronting Alaska Natives:

1. AkPIRG takes seriously the charge that the American government treated Alaska Natives as guinea pigs for radioactive research. With the help of Ralph Nader's Washington-based Essential Information project it is working for full disclosure of classified government documents from the Cold War era for distribution to impacted Native organizations.

2. AkPIRG alerted Kotzebue and the Northwest Arctic Borough when the DOE disclosed in February that it planned to take a low draft barge full of radioactive materials to Kotzebue from the site of the dump. The resulting outcry caused the DOE to bypass Kotzebue and all Alaska coastal towns and resources.

3. AkPIRG continues to investigate the role of the Public Health Service in Project Chariot and other radioactive experiments and is pressing for independent investigations of the possible link between American radioactive material and high rates of cancer as well as radioactive contamination

of subsistence wildlife.

4. AkPIRG presented the first workshop on inadequate water and sewage facilities in Alaska's villages at last year's AFN convention. AkPIRG pressed for additional state and federal funding. AkPIRG alerted towns and villages to the dangers of hepatitis A and succeeded in alerting Kotzebue officials that vaccine was available from a major drug company.

Both the radiation and sewage conditions are instances of environmental racism that no other Alaska-based environmental group has put at the top of its agenda.

5. AkPIRG brought back enforcement of the consumer protection laws by the state and continues to press for a toll free bush hotline to the Department of Law. It is currently seeking an independent Citizens Utility Board to protect the power cost equalization subsidy, among other consumer concerns.

6. AkPIRG had the first conference on Alaska native legal is-

ssues for the public at Alaska Pacific University in 1992 with the active support of the Alaska Native section of the state bar association and the Alaska Humanities Forum.

7. AkPIRG successfully got the state and federal governments to take seriously charges of price fixing and market manipulation of the fish market by the Japanese.

With 3,000 members and not a dime of government support, this non-profit research and advocacy group seeks new members and volunteers. If you want to join or help, write AkPIRG, P.O. Box 101093, Anchorage, 99510. Whether you join or not, we welcome your ideas.

Sincerely,
Steve Conn
(Retired UAA Professor of
Justice)
Special Projects Officer