

Gas pipeline affirmative action plan approved

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An affirmative action plan for employment and procurement for the Alaska segment of the Natural Gas Pipeline has been announced but major factors of the plan such as minority training and job call sites still have to be worked out.

Approval of the plan was announced last week at a press

conference held by the office of the federal inspector of the Alaska Natural Gas Transportation system.

Current projected start date for the gas line construction is 1986.

The 600-page plan calls for 17 percent of all persons hired on the pipeline to be minority. Of that, 10.9 percent should be Alaska Natives. The plan anticipates that at the peak hiring per-

iod in 1985, 13,000 workers will be employed.

Under federal regulations established by the Department of the Interior, preference for employment on individual projects must be given to Alaskan Natives living on or near a reservation which is within commuting distance of any project activity. That preference applies to that project only.

Companies with fewer than 50 employees are excluded from the requirements.

The plan anticipates that more than 70 percent of the employees will be craft workers, operatives and laborers. Of these, 90 percent will be provided by five unions. The breakdown is laborers, 2,100; culinary workers, 1,100; operating engineers, 3,000; teamsters, 2,000 and pipeline welders, 1,000.

The unions have been a big problem in the past and the situation with unions will be watched, according to John Alexander, Director of Equal Employment Opportunities, Office of the Federal Inspector.

Alexander said that to this point "it has not been necessary to interface with the unions to get the Affirmative Action plan. It will and has been necessary to

talk with the unions about training and recruiting and they have been very heavily involved."

The union situation is one of several satellite issues to be worked upon in the coming year, said Alexander.

One of the major "satellite issues" is the problem of job call sites which cropped up during the Trans Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) construction. Union job call sites were in Anchorage and Fairbanks union halls instead of near the job site. No job call sites near the villages were operated.

Because many Alaska Natives were unable or unwilling to leave their villages to stay in Fairbanks for an uncertain job possibility, many Natives missed TAPS job opportunities.

Alexander said that many people have brought that particular problem to his attention and he will be working on it.

Sylvia Carlsson, special assistant to Alaska Federation of Natives President Frank Ferguson in the area of labor for the gas line, said the AFN generally is pleased with the affirmative action program but she is concerned about the potential for problems with unions.

"We do anticipate some problems with the unions. We don't think they are in much of a mood to change their minds on procedures. The old rural dispatch problems might crop up where people in the villages don't get the jobs even though they are union members because they aren't in the union halls (in Fairbanks). We hope they will address these problems before we can proceed."

She said that such details in the past have been negotiated by the international unions, not the union locals in Alaska. And she added that "Everyone is assuming this will be a union job. There is always the chance that

that isn't so."

Another area to be addressed by Alexander's office is training and he said that training program will be instituted before the pipeline construction begins, not after as was the case on the TAPS project. "I can remember the Department of Labor looking for training funds while they were laying pipe .. that's ludicrous."

The Department of the Interior right-of-way permit to cross federal land requires that company-sponsored, pre-employment training programs be instituted to help Native Alaskans qualify for initial employment and for job upgrading. The sponsors may use existing training programs or develop their own. On-the-job training programs for the Natives also are required and hiring preference for Alaska Natives living on or near land held by Native Corporations also is included.

A task force on training minorities to work on the pipeline has been formed with representatives from the Alaska State Pipeline Coordinator, the Alaska Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Office of the Federal Inspector, the Northwest Alaskan Pipeline Co., and representatives from organized labor, the AFN and other minority organizations. A representative of the Northwest Alaskan Pipeline Co. is chairman of the task force.

The task force will give advice on planning and implementation of a training program to help people in Alaska qualify for work on the gasline project. The group also will provide the federal inspector with information to make sure the affirmative action requirements are met.

The 1981 goal for minority business enterprise participation is \$31 million or 15 percent of contractable opportunities.