

# Village Fire Prevention Answers Being Sought

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In the villages, fire is a constant threat. Many villages have no effective fire protection. When fires do occur in these villages, they are devastating. Almost invariably, they result in loss of life and total destruction of homes and belongings.

The results are reflected in frightening statistics. Alaska leads the nation in its fire fatality rate. Fire fatalities among the Eskimo and Indian population average three times that of non-natives. Most of the dead are children - 44 per cent are under 10 years old.

What can be done? Volunteer fire departments? Most of these villages have from 25 to 400 residents. They have neither the economic base nor enough year round manpower to support such an effort.

Few villages have roads - especially in winter. Most can be reached only by plane in the winter and by tedious water voyages during the brief summer months. Water systems, when available, are unreliable for fire-fighting - especially during the severe winter months when temperatures hover for days and weeks at or below minus 40 degrees.

Even the state's small fire prevention program has been largely ineffective in the villages. With vast distances involved, it is difficult for the small fire department staff to reach each village on an effective schedule.

When they do reach the villages, they often encounter a language barrier. Their materials geared to white urban homes, are ineffective.

"The white man's fire prevention films...do not relate to the Eskimo way of life and its needs," writes a State Vocational officer "any more than a fireman's manual would relate to a fireman's manual."

Six members of the State Fire Marshall's staff and two members of the State Fire Service Training staff are hard pressed to conduct meaningful fire prevention activities in a state where a visit to one community may involve 3,000 miles of air travel through three time zones and cost \$1200.

With all of these problems, is there anything that can be done to curb the loss of human life and property in rural Alaska.

Yes, says a group of fire and vocational education specialists. To prove it, they have designed a unique village fire protection program, which will go into operation in ten villages in the lower Kuskokwim valley this fall.

If the program works, it will expand to sixty villages in this part of Alaska and eventually to all of village Alaska.

To accomplish this, a joint team involving the State Divisions of Fire Prevention and Vocational Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and representatives of several native organizations began an evaluation of the fire prevention and protection needs of village Alaska.

An evaluation team visited the 10 villages slated for the pilot program. In minus 25 to 30 degree weather they traveled by bush plane from Bethel to visit community meetings in each village. In the Kuskokwim, many villagers speak little or no English. Through an interpreter, they explained their program. They asked for comments, suggestions, ideas.

In the village meetings, many fire prevention problems came to light. In Kwethluk, for example, through interpreter Phil

lip Guy, Eskimo elders cited drinking as a cause of fires, and parents leaving their children unattended.

Village residents conducted the fire Marshall's through their homes, so they could determine local conditions and find the dangerous factors to point out in future fire prevention materials. A major problem in the villages is overcrowding.

Often, eight to twelve people live in a small one room log or frame house. Highly inflammable materials - cardboard, cloth, paper, often serve as insulation.

In the winter, with the temperature hovering below minus 40, villagers must bring their snowmobiles in to work. Dangerous inflammables come in close contact with open fire heating - leading to frightening and devastating fires.

Small windows, one exit homes, blanket covered doorways often make escape impossible if fires do occur.

Also, at many times of the year, only the very young and the very old men are left in the village.

To combat these problems, a program was devised. First efforts would be devoted to fire prevention.

In each village, the village council will choose a "fire Marshall". He will attend a regional school in Bethel. There he will learn techniques of fire prevention, extinguishment, maintenance and repair of fire extinguishing equipment.

He will learn how to teach these techniques, all in his native language, aided by audio visual materials geared to his village's needs and in their native language.

Each village will receive a selection of portable firefighting units. These are mostly dry extinguishers. To determine which types, sizes and methods are best, the program plans a test burn to be conducted in Fairbanks on April 20 and 21. There, University of Alaska researchers and trained Fairbanks Fire Department personnel will simulate village housing conditions and test equipment - with both trained personnel and village residents using the equipment.

State and federal officials will provide support and evaluation services for the villages. They will supplement the Eskimo language instructional materials. Video tapes will be designed by the UA Audiovisual Aids Department and narrated in the Eskimo language.

To accomplish this program, its originators visualize a program which will reach all, or almost all village residents. Men, women and teenagers will learn fire prevention practices and first aid firefighting.

"Perhaps the best way to visualize this program," explain its originators, "is to compare it with the community bucket brigades of early rural America. The need for total village participation is the same.

The difference lies in the fact that the traditional bucket will be replaced by modern multi-purpose fire extinguishing equipment together with a continuing program of home fire prevention. If this many faceted program is a success, it will be principally due to the interest and concern of the native peoples of Alaska."

At present, the project has a close deadline. The BIA has appropriated 10,000 this year for the initial program. However, the money must be ear-

## Natives Would Do Census Program

A program that would allow Native Alaskans to do the work in a land claims census was announced by U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens.

A portion of the funds for a preliminary census-scheduled six months after a land settlement-are included in the 1972 budget for the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Estimated cost of the program is \$800,000. A total of \$600,000 is in the 1972 budget for the project.

The Alaska Federation of Natives would be hired to do the census in the Lower 48 and urban areas. In addition, the AFN would compile a master roll.

## Administration Land Claims Bill ...

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life refuges.

The total acreage selected by Native villages could amount to 22½ million acres. Should a village be unable to select land from adjacent townships due to the bill's stipulations on selection, it could select lands located elsewhere until the maximum allotted acreage is accumulated.

Villages hit hardest by the stipulations would include areas such as Tanacross, which lost much land to the State because of its partnership with the Bureau of Land Management in suppressing Native claims.

Barrow and other Arctic Slope villages could not select land from Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4. Southeastern villages could not select National Forest lands, and Nunivak Island could not select land from the Wildlife Refuge on which it is located.

Once selections have been made by the villages, a statewide Native development corporation created by the bill could begin its selection of the

remaining 17½ million acres.

Selections by the statewide corporation could be made from a 30 mile square area surrounding each village. The same stipulations placed on village selection would also apply to the statewide corporation.

The financial portion of the proposed settlement is split into two forms of payment.

500 million dollars would be paid to the Native development corporation in payments of 25 million annually over 20 years.

An additional 500 million dollars would be derived from a two per cent royalty on state and federal revenues received from mineral exploration and development.

The entire package would be overseen by a three-man Alaska Native Claims Commission appointed by the President. It would have the additional responsibility of determining designation of Native groups and individuals eligible for participation in the settlement.

The Administration bill has already been introduced in the House and, after introduction Monday in the Senate, Congressional action on proposed legislation is expected to accelerate. The AFN now believes that a claims bill may become law in June.

## Rural Affairs ...

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ship, before testifying before the Senate Land Claims Hearings in January.

At present, appointees are being informed of their appointment and of the April 19 meeting and travel arrangements are being finalized.

The Commission appointees are:

For terms expiring July 1971: Harvey Samuelson, Laura Bergt, Willie Hensley, Carl Moses, Cecil Barnes, Ray Roberts, Robert Willard, Gilbert Olsen, Roy Ewan, Al Ketzler, Tim Wallis, Francis Degnan, Chuck Degnan, Phillip Guy, Jerry Nelson and Alice Brown.

For terms expiring July 1972: Joe Upicksoun, Larry Carter, Albert Adams, Nels Anderson, Seraphim Stephan, Charles Franz, Ed Naughton, George Miller, Byron Mallott, George Andola, Nelson Ahvakana, Frank Ferguson, Jerome Trigg, Clarence Peele, John Oktolik, Robert Newlin.

For terms expiring July 1973: Donald Peter, Larry Merculief, John Shively, Willard Bowman, Robert Dittman, Eben Hopson, Larry Oskolkoff, Donald Wright, Emil Notti, Clarence Moy Jr., Ed Anderson, Frank Degnan, Sam Kito, Ray Christiansen, Daniel Lisbon, John Borbridge.

marked by early May. Research work must be completed by that time - or the appropriation may be lost.

Fire department officials, University of Alaska researchers and technicians and State Fire Prevention Education and Fire Marshal personnel are moving ahead at full speed with plans for their Fairbanks test burns. When the results of these are in, they will know which equipment to order.

Hopefully, in the future, fire in a village home will not mean death and total destruction. Villagers will be able to save trapped children and adults, contain small fires and prevent most of them.

## Edwardson

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United States of America meet its obligation of justice toward its own citizens."

Edwardson, one of the most outspoken of the Alaskan native leaders, has often opposed the AFN President on such issues as land distribution and the methods to be used in obtaining a land claims settlement. In recent weeks, however, he has joined ASNA President Joseph Upicksoun in commending Wright's leadership in the land claims fight.

In a recent telephone call to the Tundra Times, Upicksoun emphasized Wright's strong and effective leadership and coordination of the land claims fight.

At that time, Upicksoun was spending several days in Washington, D.C. observing and participating in the lobbying effort and was increasingly impressed, he said, by Wright's efforts.

At the present time, AFN lobbying efforts are coordinated through the AFN's new Washington, D.C. office in the Capitol Hill Hotel. There, board members have a centralized command post complete with office staff and equipment.

"ASNA still deplores President Nixon's failure to endorse regional corporations and still believes that it is wrong to have one ethnic group being bossed by another," Edwardson emphasized, "whether it be Aleuts over Athabascans or Navajos over Seminoles, or France over Germany."

"ASNA, therefore, will continue to fight and fight hard for this principle as well as the other basic features of the Bill."

"The purpose of this letter is to express ASNA's appreciation," he ended, "at long last for having some leadership in the Federation."

## Seattle Times' Patty ...

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to control their own destiny," Upicksoun told Patty as he has told many others. "To do this we must retain complete ownership of our ancestral lands."

"There are things we want to develop in our own way - without having the Anglo or the Euro cultures, or anyone else forcing their system on us."

"The solution is land. Land is the final source of all capital. Land is it!" Upicksoun affirms.

At home in Barrow, the 39 year old president of ASNA is plant manager of Barrow Utilities, Inc., a village corporation with assets totaling \$14 million. He is also chairman of the advisory school board at Barrow.

Upicksoun was born in Point Lay, a tiny village west of Barrow on the Chukchi Sea. He left home early to attend BIA schools and then served two hitches in the Army, including combat duty in Korea. He has been a merchant-marine engineer. He has a wife and two sons, 6 and 7.

Then, one day Upicksoun returned to Barrow - to stay. In his own search for identity, he began to find the identity of his native Eskimo people and began a fight for their rights.

Last week the ASNA announced they would sue to evict the State of Alaska and the oil companies trespassers on their lands.

"They are determined that development will not proceed until the Arctic Slope people are compensated fairly for what will amount to extinguishment of their aboriginal title to the lands for all time," Patty explained.

"What really triggered the lawsuit," the columnist continued, "was President Nixon's announcement of a formula to

settle the land claims that would vest control of the rich settlement proceeds in a single, statewide Alaska native corporation.

"The Arctic Slope association had made it clear long ago that this provision could not be accepted.

"What the association wants is a system of seven or so regional corporations, based on the distinct ethnic and cultural divisions within Alaska's native population. With a single corporation, the 4,000 Eskimos feel they would be outnumbered and "swallowed up" by the rest of Alaska's 55,000 - plus natives.

"They never will tolerate Caucasians making decisions that will chart their destiny. Neither do they want other native groups settling such policies. They want to do it themselves and will not compromise," Patty told his readers.

"This issue is not negotiable," Upicksoun said.

"Will the natives with their separate cultures already fractured by the white man be compensated fairly for their lands, then left alone to determine their own destinies?" Patty asks. "Or will this pass into history as another sorry chapter in America's dealings with the first Alaskans."

Upicksoun and his lieutenants are calling this "a time of conscience" for all Americans, the Seattle Times columnist quotes.

"Perhaps," he writes, "with this in mind it is easier to understand why fires are burning today inside men like Joe Upicksoun."

"Time is running out for the Eskimo."