

Alaska Forum Press Release

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Poisoning the Well:
Report Details Illegal Hazardous Waste
Injections into North Slope Oil Wells

A report prepared by the Alaska Forum for Environmental Responsibility (Alaska Forum) details illegal hazardous waste injections at a North Slope oil field. The report is based on public records in the case of a whistleblower working on an Endicott Island oil rig. The concerned worker refused to participate in the illegal practices himself and brought them to the attention of his managers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, he then became the target of threats and harassment by managers and employees of his company, Doyon Drilling Services, Ltd.

The Alaska Forum's report, called Poisoning the Well, details serious incidents on Endicott Island in 1995 that have become the subject of an on-going criminal investigation by the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Attorney's office, and a federal grand jury.

The report concludes that lax regulatory oversight allowed the practices to occur for a period of up to five years, and that the practices at Endicott may be widespread on the North Slope.

"Were it not for the actions of this courageous individual, and his refusal to tolerate illegal and environmentally destructive practices, this waste dumping would still be happening," said Stan Stephens, president of the Alaska Forum.

"Considering that this worker risked his safety and sacrificed his twenty year career in the oil industry, federal investigators should ensure that their investigation comes to a just conclusion and sees the light of day. Doyon should be held accountable." said Stephens.

Limited details of the incidents were previously reported in

early 1996. The Alaska Forum has since obtained detailed documentation, but has chosen to withhold the identity of the whistleblower to protect him and the on-going investigation. The illegal and environmentally destructive injections of hazardous wastes into Endicott Island well holes suggest that the North Slope oil industry needs to change its practices before the public can be assured that proposed development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the National Petroleum Reserve Alaska will occur in a safe and responsible manner.

In January 1997, the Clinton Administration - at the urging of Alaska Governor Tony Knowles - announced that it will begin the planning process for possible oil development of the National Petroleum Reserve, a 23 million-acre area to the west of Prudhoe Bay that is home to migratory waterfowl and other animals.

Jim Ayers, chief of staff to Governor Knowles, has said that development of parts of petroleum reserve will provide the industry with an opportunity to show the rest of the country that Alaska can "do it right."

However, the report suggests that the industry has not faced up to the possibility of widespread underground hazardous waste injections.

The report shows that for a period of 18-months, contaminated snow melt, as well as used oil and glycol antifreeze, were improperly injected into an Endicott disposal well operated by British Petroleum. Upon initially learning of the improper practices, neither state nor federal regulatory agencies took the incidents very seriously.

When an employee of BP contractor Doyon Drilling Services Ltd., disclosed to BP managers that workers on Doyon Rig 15 regularly disposed of waste oils, paint thinners, glycol, and solvents into another well in violation of federal environmental laws, BP and several regulatory agencies began investigations.

The Doyon employee who revealed these practices became the subject of harassment, including threats to him and the safety of his family. A subsequent U.S. Department of Labor investigation found that the whistleblower had suffered retaliation and harassment at

the hands of Doyon management and coworkers. Doyon recently settled the worker's case.

Concerned citizens Stan Stephens, Riki Ott and Dan Lawn founded the Alaska Forum for Environmental Responsibility in 1994. The group's mission is to hold industry and government accountable to the public laws designed to protect worker safety and the environment in Alaska. The group has developed a network of anonymous oil industry workers who, in fear of retaliation by their employers and suspicious of government regulators, channel their concerns about the oil industry practices through the Alaska Forum.

Got to the Executive Summary of Poisoning the Well (~ 5 pages).

Go to the complete, documented text of Poisoning the Well (~ 18 pages).

Go to Related Opinion Piece by Stan Stephens, President, Alaska Forum.