

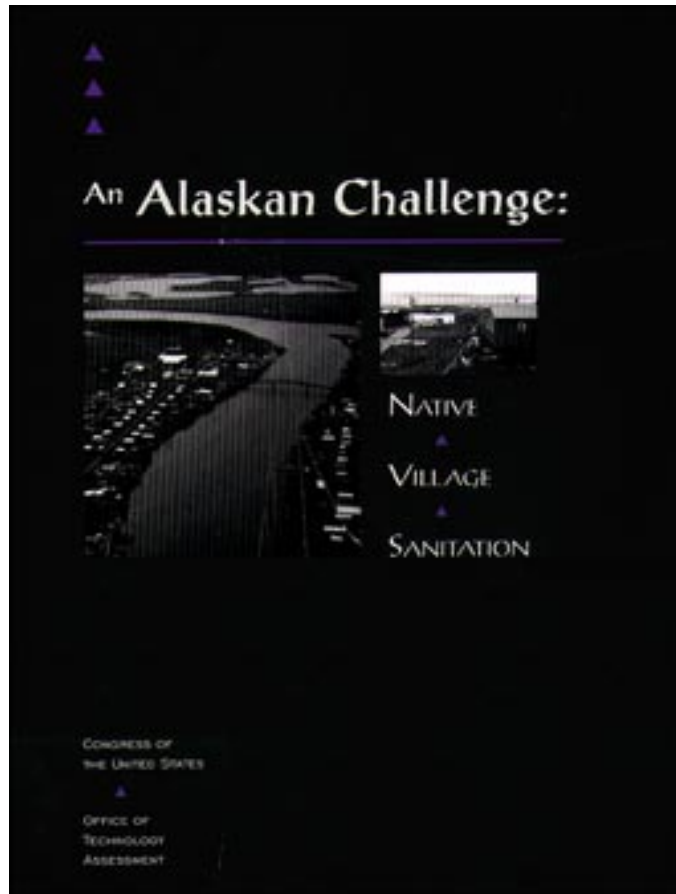
*An Alaskan Challenge: Native Village
Sanitation*

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Foreword

More than 20,000 rural Native residents in Alaska live in communities without running water and where homes, local government offices, commercial buildings, and even medical clinics use plastic buckets for toilets—euphemistically called “honey buckets.” The waste from these toilets is often spilled in the process of hauling it to disposal sites, and these spillages have led to the outbreak of epidemic diseases such as Hepatitis A.

This OTA assessment, requested by Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, reviews the status of federal government efforts to provide safe sanitation to Alaskan Natives and the technologies that have been used or proposed for this purpose. Information about similarly relevant efforts by State and Native governments is also provided. A significant portion of this research also focuses on the geographic, social, and economic settings of the Natives and their remote communities. Finally, the work examines the legislative and institutional setting for the waste sanitation problems, and the criteria that need to be applied in selecting and implementing new technologies.

Providing safe water and waste sanitation systems to Alaskan Native villages has been more difficult, expensive, and time consuming than in any other region of the United States—particularly because of the unusual technical constraints. Despite considerable efforts by the Indian Health Services and others, only half of the 191 Native villages have adequate sanitation.

Two major types of measures appear to be needed to support the development and application of cost-effective alternatives in the long-term: 1) a comprehensive Federal research, development, and testing program for innovative sanitation technologies; and 2) increased financial support for operation and maintenance and technical assistance programs.

OTA’s staff received splendid support from Federal, State, and Native organizations and private sector individuals during the preparation of this report. Of special significance is the assistance provided by Native leaders, sanitation experts, and village residents during our visit to rural Alaska. Invaluable assistance and guidance was also provided by the Alaska Area Native Health Service, the Village Safe Water, and the University of Alaska-Anchorage.

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ROGER C. HERDMAN
Director

Reviewers

Mike Black

Alaska Department of Community
and Regional Affairs

John Bouzoun

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Cold Regions Research and
Engineering Laboratory

Patrick A. Brown

CHETS International
Seward, Alaska

Greg Capito

Alaska Department of
Environmental Conservation

Roger Clark

City of Selawik

Tom Coolidge

Alaska Area Native Health
Service

James Crum

Alaska Area Native Health
Service

Tudor Davies

U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency
Anchorage, Alaska

Chuck Eggener

Chuck Eggener Consulting
Engineers
Anchorage, Alaska

J.P. Godfrey

Alaska Science and Technology
Foundation

Hollis D. Hall

University of Alaska Fairbanks

Samuel E. Hardin

Farmers Home Administration
Palmer, Alaska

Thomas Joyce

ACTION — Region 10

Julie Kitka

Alaska Federation of Natives

Ed McKiernan

SeaLand Technology, Inc.

Larry Mercurief

Alaska Sanitation Task Force

John Olofsson

University of Alaska Anchorage

James Peterson

U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency Region 10

Bernhard Richert

Economic Development
Administration
Anchorage, Alaska

Randy Romenesko

Alaska Department of
Environmental Conservation

John Schaeffer

NANA Corporation

Herb Schroeder

University of Alaska Anchorage

Paul Sherry

Alaska Native Health Board

Dave Shoultz

Yukon Kuskokwim Health
Corporation

John Spriggs

Maniilaq Association

John W. Sibert

Alaska Science and Technology
Foundation

Kathleen Vietch

U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency Region 10

Ann Walker

Alaska Native Health Board

Orie Williams

Yukon Kuskokwim Health
Corporation

Peter Williams

City of Napaskiak

Project Staff

Clyde Behney
Assistant Director, OTA
*Health, Education, and
Environment*

Robert W. Niblock
Environment Program
Director

GERMAN E. REYES
Project Director

CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Friedman

Peter Johnson

Robert Niblock

CONTRACTORS

**John Olofsson and
Jeffrey Schroeder**
University of Alaska Anchorage

Florence Poillon
Editor

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Kathleen A. Beil
Office Administrator

Kimberly Holmlund
Administrative Secretary

Sharon Knarvik
Secretary

Barbara Bradley
Secretary

Workshop Participants

Mike Black

Alaska Department of Community
and Regional Affairs

Greg Capito

Alaska Department of
Environmental Conservation

Tom Coolidge

Alaska Area Native Health
Service

James Crum

Alaska Area Native Health
Service

Chuck Eggener

Chuck Eggener Consulting
Engineers
Anchorage, Alaska

J.P. Godfrey

Alaska Science and Technology
Foundation

John Olofsson

University of Alaska Anchorage

Randy Romenesko

Alaska Department of
Environmental Conservation

John Schaeffer

NANA Corporation

Herb Schroeder

University of Alaska Anchorage

John W. Sibert

Alaska Science and Technology
Foundation

Ann Walker

Alaska Native Health Board

Orie Williams

Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corp.