



THE STATE  
of **ALASKA**  
GOVERNOR MIKE DUNLEAVY

**Department of Environmental  
Conservation**

DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

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February 18, 2021

The Honorable David Wilson  
Chair, Senate Finance Subcommittee  
State Capitol Room 121  
Juneau AK, 99801

Dear Senator Wilson:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an overview of the Department of Environmental Conservation's FY2022 budget request on February 16<sup>th</sup>. A question arose during this meeting that required follow-up, which I have responded to below. In addition, please find attached a document describing the Department's engagement in the Tuluksak washeteria fire response.

***Two years ago, about \$9.5 million came into the state as a grant to deal with PFAS contamination. How much has been spent, where have you spent it, and if you have not spent it why not? (Sen. Begich)***

In FY2019, the legislature appropriated \$9,425,000 from the Response Account of the Oil and Hazardous Substance Release Prevention and Response Fund to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) contamination at State-owned airports. \$569,603 has been expended to date, and \$1,362,952 is obligated for current and planned work through contracts and reimbursable service agreements with the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities. The funds have been used to perform site assessment, site characterization, drinking water monitoring, shipping/disposal of PFAS, and provision of on-airport drinking water. The current unobligated balance of the appropriation is \$7,492,445.

If you would like more information or have additional questions, I am happy to assist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ruth Kostik".

Ruth Kostik  
Administrative Services Director

Attachment: DEC Involvement in the Tuluksak Washeteria Fire Response

Cc: Michael Partlow, Legislative Finance Division  
Jake Quarstad, Office of Management and Budget  
Gary Zepp, Staff to Senator Wilson

## DEC Involvement in the Tuluksak Washeteria Fire Response

Around noon on Saturday, January 16, 2021 a Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Village Safe Water (VSW) engineer, was notified of the Tuluksak water treatment plant/washeteria fire while it was in progress. The VSW engineer notified DEC's liaison to the State Emergency Operations Center (SEOC). The liaison reached out to the SEOC, DEC's Facilities Manager (who oversees the VSW program) and DEC's Drinking Water Program. VSW notified key staff at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium's (ANTHC) Tribal Utility Support team. The latter has a small amount of emergency funding available (generally \$5,000 per emergency) as well as staff equipped to respond to emergencies. Additionally, VSW asked DEC's Remote Maintenance Worker (RMW) Program to contact the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Corporation (YKHC) RMW<sup>1</sup> Program to gather information about the fire and YKHC's plans for emergency response. YKHC reported immediately that the building was expected to be a total loss and that their team was making arrangements for a site visit to assess the damage and make plans for short term needs. VSW also gathered planning documents regarding the water treatment plant and washeteria, which included images and maps, and shared them with DEC's Liaison to pass on to the SEOC for reference.

On Wednesday, January 20, the rural sanitation funders group, comprised of representatives of EPA, USDA Rural Development (USDA RD), Indian Health Service (IHS), VSW and ANTHC, held a regular monthly coordination meeting, in which the primary agenda item was developing a plan for funding replacement of the water treatment plant/washeteria. Later that day, YKHC coordinated a meeting with the community, state and federal agencies, and technical assistance providers, to discuss the findings of the RMW's site visit from January 18, potential short and long term solutions, as well as possible funding sources for each solution. While VSW does not have any sources of emergency funding, several other sources were identified. During this meeting, staff from both the Rural Utility Business Advisor Program within the Department of Community, Commerce and Economic Development, and the SEOC, indicated that they were assisting the community in drafting a resolution to declare a local emergency. At the conclusion of the meeting, YKHC indicated that they would follow up with the specific agencies that had possible sources of emergency funding.

On Tuesday, January 26, YKHC coordinated another meeting with the community and agency representatives to discuss progress on interim and long term solutions and funding sources. YKHC had developed a plan that includes three phases. Phase 1 consists of installing a pump in the Tuluksak River and piping the water to the school's piped system. This would allow for a temporary laundry facility to be set up and piped non-potable water to be available to the community. Phase 2 would involve hauling a small water treatment plant owned by YKHC to Tuluksak via the ice road, which would provide potable water for community members to haul to their homes. Phase 3 would be design and construction of a new water treatment plant/washeteria, which will take approximately two years. YKHC indicated their plans and ability to proceed with Phases 1 and 2 while funding is sought for Phase 3.

Following this meeting, IHS requested that the rural sanitation funders group meet to consider a proposal to use IHS funds to the permanent replacement project. That meeting was held on January 28. While IHS has subsequently indicated that they intend to fund the project as soon as funding becomes available in the spring of 2021, the details of this plan are still being finalized. Once funding is established, VSW will manage the water treatment plant/washeteria replacement design and construction project.

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<sup>1</sup> The YKHC RMW program is funded through a grant from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. YKHC directly employs five RMWs, two of whom live and work in Bethel, to provide onsite training, technical assistance, and emergency response to rural water and wastewater utilities in their region.

On Monday, February 8, three RMW staff from YKHC mobilized to Tulusak to begin work on the Phase 1 project.

DEC's Drinking Water Program was contacted by the Office of Environmental Health at the Yukon Kuskokwim Heath Corporation, on February 9 to discuss both short term and medium term plans to provide potable water in Tuluksak. DEC Drinking Water Program staff are working with the contract engineer, CRW, to provide guidance and technical assistance on the plan to utilize a modular water treatment unit and storage tank currently located in Bethel as the medium term solution to providing potable water to the community. We will continue to work with YKHC and CRW to ensure that engineering plans are reviewed on an emergency basis.

Throughout the course of the past month, DEC staff in the VSW and Drinking Water programs have continually coordinated with the Department's SEOC lead, YKHC, and funding partners to facilitate response efforts. Daily correspondence regarding the response plan is ongoing. Additionally, the Drinking Water Program issued a Boil Water Notice to remind community members that they should boil river water to ensure it is safe to consume, and coordinated with DHSS to ensure pre-mixed baby formula was provided to the community.