

HJR

80

Report says federal housing for Alaska Natives is a mess

By GEORGE FROST
Daily News reporter

A federal housing program for Alaska Natives is riddled with waste, and many of the homes built since 1975 are unsafe, substandard and ill-suited to harsh arctic conditions, according to a study released Tuesday by a federal housing inspector.

The program, administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, is so poorly run that it must be considered a failure, said Rich Nygaard, regional inspector general for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"Despite more than 14 years experience, HUD has

not provided Alaska Natives with decent, safe or affordable housing. Design and construction defects, deferred maintenance and poor housekeeping continues to create safety and health hazards for Alaska families," he said.

Local HUD officials disagreed strenuously with many of the audit findings.

"We feel the audit report is completely flawed and does not cover what they said they were covering," said Arlene Patten, acting HUD manager of the Anchorage office. "It is based on a false premise and a misunderstanding of the program."

Patten said the audit fo-

cused on projects built in the late 1970s and early 1980s startup phase of the program and "does not show the substantial improvements."

"Since then, most of these things have been corrected and the homes are no longer substandard," she said.

"I think the program is trying to meet the need of the regional Bush people of Alaska, and without that program there would be no housing out there for them."

More than \$300 million has been spent to build 3,290 single-family homes under the Alaska Mutual Help Home Ownership Program.

Please see Back Page, HOMES

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The Alaska program, part of a nationwide Indian housing system, gives low-income Native families an opportunity to purchase their own homes. They pay whatever they can afford, and HUD makes the remainder of the loan payments.

Of all the homes built since 1975, more than six of every 10 have been either the subject of a lawsuit because of poor construction or have required extra HUD funding to correct those problems, according to the detailed, 141-page report.

An inspection of 207 of the 714 newer homes built since 1984 showed that almost all had serious problems. All 207 had defective foundations. Many of the homes rest on primitive pads that are unsuited for the fragile tundra, subject to summertime floods and fierce winter storms.

Fifty-seven had broken or deficient furnaces, stoves and other mechanical systems.

"In some projects, home and basic sanitary maintenance was quite limited and others nonexistent," the study said.

A series of inspections in villages throughout the Bush turned up numerous safety hazards: broken stairs and porches, tottering foundations, and electrical hazards from improperly installed lighting fixtures, the audit said.

Some families use Coleman camping stoves to cook their meals because their regular stoves are broken or they can't afford propane cylinders that fuel them. Others burn creosote-soaked driftwood for heating, another potential hazard.

Nine of 50 homeowners in one village reported that cracks in the flooring of their homes allowed winds to "enter with such force that it raises the vinyl floor-

ing off the floor, creating an effect like walking on pillows."

And in wintertime, interior walls are sheathed in up to 4 inches of ice, the audit found.

HUD contracts with 13 different Indian Housing Authorities, most of them subdivisions of local government or Native corporations and agencies, to run the program.

William Nishamura, regional HUD administrator for Alaska, disagreed that a majority of homes are substandard. The audit ignored the complexities of building in the Arctic, he said. Building standards and materials are not yet perfected for Alaska.

Nishamura laid blame for many of the problems at the door of the Native housing agencies. Building sites are chosen by the Native agencies, which also provide the soils engineers, architects, planners and builders, he said.

A majority of problems cited in the report are caused by poor maintenance, not poor design or construction. And it is the responsibility of Native housing agencies to train homebuyers how to maintain their furnaces, stoves and foundations, not HUD's, he said.

John Guinn, executive director of a Bethel-based housing agency run by the Association of Village Council Presidents, agreed with many criticisms in the audit but said the program was not a failure.

"I disagree that it's not working. It's been very effective in providing housing for the needy. The program just needs somebody at HUD who is willing to stand up for what we need."

Guinn said the housing program operated at a furious pace in the early 1980s, and mistakes were made.

"A lot of it was finding a contractor who knew how to

build in rural Alaska," he said. "And a lot of (housing) directors didn't have construction experience. We were playing catchup. I think our housing authorities built over 400 in one year."

"We were building so fast there would have been problems in construction and in HUD oversight."

In the early years of the program, homes were built to Lower 48 standards, he said. "There were not adequate furnaces, not adequately insulated. They (HUD) don't realize that when it's 30 below and blowing 100 outside you have got quite a wind-chill factor."

The Native housing agencies are repairing many of the problems and training families in basic maintenance, he said.

"They are all being repaired. We will authorize \$25,000 or more per house for new furnaces, doors, insulation."

A problem that all concerned agreed on was a shortage of money for the program, and an unrealistic "cap" of \$92,200 that can be spent for any one home.

That money must stretch to pay for "planning, architecture, a soils engineer, shipping, construction, everything," Guinn said. "In many cases in remote villages it is not enough to do the job, so at some point you have to cut corners."

"When you get out to some of these remote tundra villages, gravel is like gold," he said. "You can't afford to fly it in. A couple years down the road the house starts moving."

Guinn said that HUD signs off on every home that is built, and "someplace along the line I think somebody in the HUD system should have had the intestinal fortitude to say this foundation won't work or this heating system isn't adequate."

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS

IT IS THE POLICY OF THE STATE OF ALASKA THAT HOUSING IN THE STATE SHOULD MEET SPECIFIC QUALITY STANDARDS.

BACKGROUND:

In Alaska, the state has adopted only those sections of the Uniform Building Code (UBC) that deal with life safety; neither the technical information or structural requirements have been adopted.

Some local communities, such as Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, Dillingham, and Kenai have adopted the UBC in its entirety, along with the Uniform Plumbing and Mechanical Codes. In other parts of the state, particularly rural areas, there are no structural building codes in place.

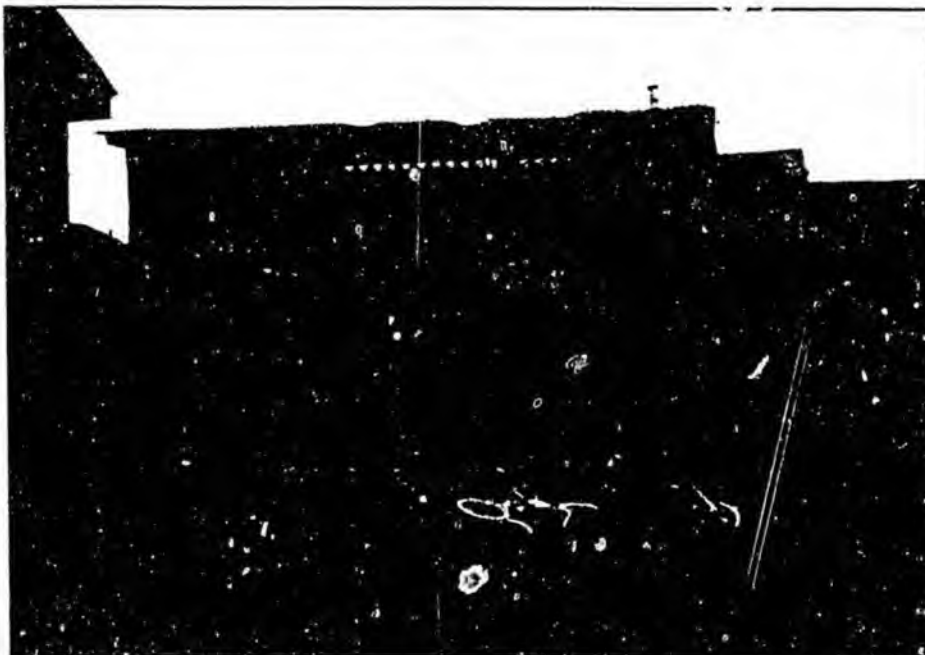
In the Bush, the lack of standards is compounded by the fact that some of the housing provided by the federal government has been built to "Lower 48," not Alaskan housing standards.

FINDINGS:

1. The 1988 DCRA Rural Housing Needs Assessment states that 6,740 homes in the Bush are so substandard that they should be immediately replaced.
2. The same study points out that 36% of rural homes can not maintain an inside temperature of 70 degrees during the winter.
3. Rural families spend up to 37% of their income to heat and light their homes.
4. Recently passed federal legislation mandates that by July 1, 1991, commercial banks, savings and loans, and credit unions with federal insurance use only state certified real estate appraisers. Alaska has no such state licensing or certification program for real estate appraisers.

RECOMMENDED ACTION PLANS:

1. The state should adopt building codes and allow for regional differences and amendments.



*Home in
Kwethluk,
Alaska*

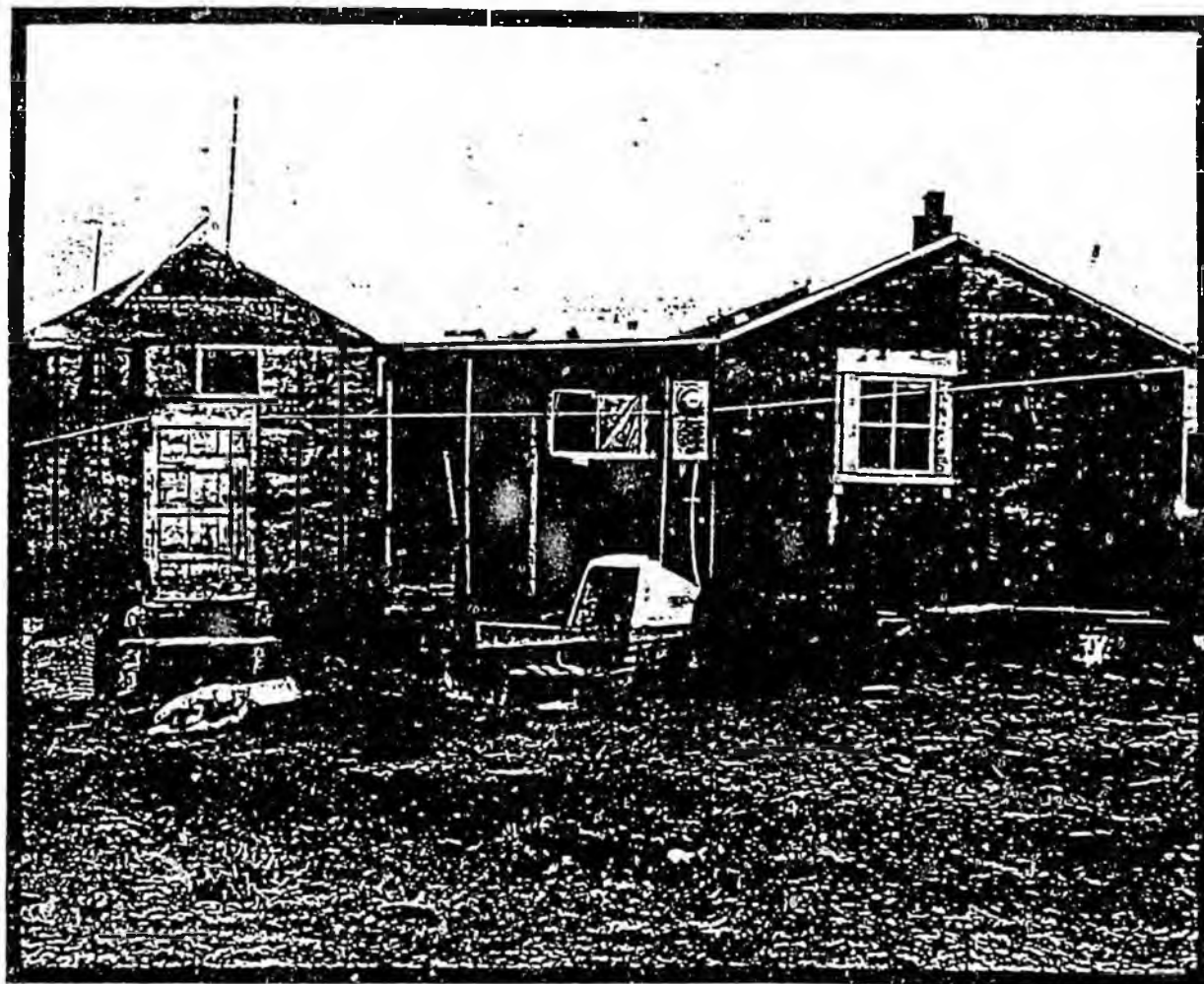
2. The state should adopt more stringent contractor licensing requirements. By June 30, 1990, the Alaska State Legislature should pass Senate Bill 72, or other appropriate legislation, to strengthen residential contractor licensing requirements. Those requirements should include continuing education.
3. In accordance with federal guidelines, the state should establish a state licensing or certification program for real estate appraisers by January 1, 1991.
5. State agencies should not fund the financing of existing substandard housing, with the following exception: If the existing structure currently has a state financed mortgage and meets standards #1-4 of the committee's definition of "substandard," the size requirement will be waived.
6. The state should continue to support the Home Weatherization program, which is primarily funded by the federal government.

Committee's Definition of Substandard:

1. **Dilapidated:** Where dilapidated means a housing unit that does not provide safe and adequate shelter and endangers the health, safety, or well being of its occupants.
2. A unit that has plumbing that does not conform to the typical community standards of the area it is located in.
3. A unit that does not have adequate or safe electrical service if electricity is available in the community and there is access to it.
4. A unit that cannot maintain an indoor air temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit.
5. A building that has less than 600 square feet of living space with 200 square feet per resident.

4. The state should actively lobby for, and support the financing of, affordable housing in rural areas under federal programs such as HUD's Mutual Help program, the BIA's Housing Improvement Program and the Department of Energy's Home Energy Program. However, the structure and management of these programs should be closely reviewed by the federal government and revised, where necessary.
7. The Alaska State Legislature should enact legislation to restore clear legal authority for the implementation of appropriate minimum thermal standards, based on regional differences, for newly constructed state-financed housing.

1988 Rural Housing Needs Assessment Study



DOYON Region - Photo by Rob Stapleton, Jr.

State of Alaska
Steve Cowper, Governor



Department of Community
and Regional Affairs
David G. Hoffman, Commissioner

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Alaska Department of Community and Regional Affairs

by

Rural Alaska Community Action Program (RurAL CAP)
ASK* Marketing Information Search
Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG)

March 1983

DCRA Rural Housing Needs Study

HOUSING PHYSICAL CONDITION BASED ON INSULATION

In the following table, percentages of houses with attics and walls of different R-values are listed by region. R-values refer to the level of insulation. One inch of batt insulation is approximately equal to R-3. For example, R-38 is equivalent to 12 inches of batt, and R-19 is equivalent to 6 inches of batt.

Insulation Levels in Percentages:

	-----Attic-----					---Walls---		Can't Maint 70 deg F
	R<R11	R<R19	R<R22	R<R30	R<R38	R<R11	R<R19	
Ahtna	15%	51%	78%	80%	96%	22%	69%	56%
Aleut	23%	36%	50%	65%	76%	23%	45%	16%
Arctic Slope	0%	6%	19%	36%	56%	1%	18%	37%
Bering Sts	14%	29%	89%	94%	97%	11%	41%	67%
Bristol Bay	14%	39%	76%	78%	90%	19%	52%	22%
Calista	3%	34%	68%	77%	77%	11%	78%	41%
Chugach	16%	26%	47%	56%	71%	20%	52%	15%
Cook Inlet	7%	22%	52%	71%	77%	10%	62%	12%
Dcyon	4%	18%	47%	74%	79%	11%	65%	40%
Koniag	2%	11%	17%	18%	20%	3%	63%	27%
NANA	25%	25%	50%	50%	50%	1%	26%	72%
Sealaska	12%	55%	93%	95%	97%	15%	81%	41%
TOTAL	9%	29%	58%	69%	76%	12%	57%	36%

According to the 1986 Energy Conservation Standard For New Residential Buildings published by the State DCRA Office of Energy Programs, the minimum prescribed insulation requirement for ceilings is R-38, except in Arctic Slope where the ceiling requirement is R-52. The minimum prescribed insulation requirements for walls are R-21 in Sealaska; R-18 in Aleut, Chugach, Cook Inlet, and Koniag; R-25 in Ahtna, Bristol Bay, Calista, and Doyon; R-30 in Bering Straits and NANA; and R-35 in Arctic Slope.

Houses with attic R-values less than R-38 range from 71% to 97% in nine of the regions, and more than half of the houses in two more regions. Houses with wall R-values less than R-19 range from 41% to 81% in all but two regions.

FISCAL NOTE

REQUEST:

Revision Date: _____
 Title: Urging revision of housing require-
ments of US HUD
 Sponsor: Reps MacLean, Ulmer etc
 Requestor: _____

Agency Affected: Community & Regional Affairs
 BRU: _____
 Components: _____

EXPENDITURES/REVENUES: (Thousands of Dollars)

OPERATING	FY 91	FY 92	FY 93	FY 94	FY 95	FY 96
PERSONAL SERVICES						
TRAVEL						
CONTRACTUAL						
SUPPLIES						
EQUIPMENT						
LAND & STRUCTURES						
GRANTS, CLAIMS						
MISCELLANEOUS						
TOTAL OPERATING	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
CAPITAL						
REVENUE						

FUNDING: (Thousands of Dollars)

GENERAL FUND	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
FEDERAL FUNDS						
OTHER						
TOTAL	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-

POSITIONS:

FULL-TIME	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
PART-TIME						
TEMPORARY						

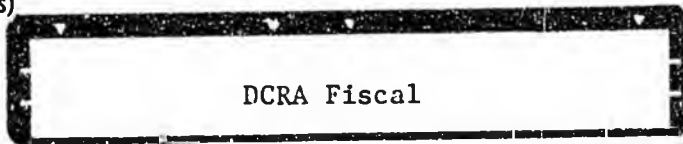
ANALYSIS : (Attach a separate page if necessary)

There is no fiscal effect for FY 90.

Prepared by: *Jim Rosman* Phone: 465-4750
 Division: Municipal & Regional Assistance Date: _____
 Approved by Commissioner: *John Green* Date: 20 Feb 90
 Agency: Community & Regional Affairs

Distribution (by preparer):

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HJR 80: Urging revision of housing requirements of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure construction of energy efficient homes in rural Alaska.

Sponsor: MacLean

The next item before the committee is House Joint Resolution 80 which urges the revision of HUD's housing requirements to ensure construction of energy efficient homes in rural Alaska.

I would like to take this opportunity to invite the sponsor of HJR 80 to the table and brief the committee on this resolution.

Alaska State Legislature

Al Adams
District L

WHILE IN SESSION
P.O. Box V
State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99811
(907) 465-3707

OUT OF SESSION
P.O. Box 333
Kotzebue, Alaska 99752
(907) 442-3245

3111 C Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99503
(907) 561-7622

Official Business

TO: Senator Mike Szymanski, Chair
Community and Regional Affairs Committee

FROM: Senator Al Adams *AAA*

RE: HJR 80 (amended): "Urging revision of housing requirements of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development to improve design, construction and maintenance of homes in rural Alaska."

DATE: March 12, 1990

I would like to see the aforementioned legislation scheduled in C&RA Committee at your earliest convenience.

Thank you.