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Cindy Heil
Division of Air Quality
Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
555 Cordova Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

RE: Air Quality in Fairbanks

Dear Ms. Heil:

Thank you for holding the recent public hearings on the Fairbanks air quality issue. I wanted to attend but was unable to. I understand, however, that I may write to you in lieu of public testimony.

I have tried to learn as much as I can about the Fairbanks air problem. I've attended all but one of Mayor Castle's annual air forums. I have taken a class concerning our air problem through the Osher Lifelong Learning program. I have also commented on this issue before the Borough Assembly. I feel I have a fairly good understanding of our problem, especially the health consequences we have faced and are facing and the importance of taking effective action now.

As I understand it, other municipalities have had some success in dealing with wood stove pollution by passing regulations that seek to modify behavior by using a classic carrot and stick approach.

The North Star Borough, under Mayor Castle, adopted a version of this approach that was strong on incentives (carrots) but very weak on disincentives (sticks). I spoke about the weakness of this lopsided approach in front of the Assembly but to no avail. Even though the regulations provided some potential penalties, from what I understand, with a few exceptions, the Mayor generally relied on the telephone to make violators aware of their responsibility.

The Mayor and the Assembly were probably worried about the political impact of a more balanced approach. But in the end, imposing minimal, ineffective sanctions did not stop the majority of the voters from rescinding the Borough's authority to regulate this public health problem.

Letter to C. Heil
Re: Fairbanks Air
Page 2

The responsibility to protect the health of our citizens has now shifted to the state and the federal government. The biggest risk caused by this shift is delay. We cannot afford more delay. We have a health crisis that must be addressed soon.

On the other hand, the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation has the expertise and the resources (I hope) to craft a balanced wood-stove-burn-ban program. Such a program would include sufficient incentives to reduce polluting stoves, take into account and adjust for low income citizens' special concerns, and importantly, provide for clear, significant and enforceable and enforced sanctions for violations. Without both the carrot and the stick, the program will have minimal impact.

On a final note, recently there has been significant comment (and work) concerning Electrostatic Precipitators. I am skeptical of the argument that we can delay dealing with our air problem because technology will save us. Nonetheless, I agree with the Borough's recent approach to fund a preliminary study about these devices. But even if these devices prove effective, that will not eliminate the need for a firm and balanced air pollution reduction program.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment, and if I can do anything to be of help, please let me know.



Larry Zervos