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P.O. Box 188, Valdez, AK 99686
Phone:(907)835-5460/Fax:(907)835-5410
E-mail: afervdz@alaskaforum.org
<http://www.alaskaforum.org>

– Advisory –

Richard Fineberg , author 907-479-7778
Walt Parker, AFER Board 907-333-5189
Riki Ott, President, 907-424-3915

Status Report on the Dubious Condition of the Aging Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) to be Released during 2nd Week of June

Now in its 25th year of operation, the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) is compromised by (1) serious recurring incidents that compromise safety and (2) chronic delays in correcting physical and programmatic deficiencies. These problems, which have the potential to disrupt both Alaska's environment and the West Coast oil supply, persist despite the fact that TAPS is probably monitored more intensively than other pipeline in the nation and its Owners reap a handsome, guaranteed profit on every barrel of oil shipped through the 800-mile pipeline.

These are the findings of a status report on the troubled pipeline prepared for the Alaska Forum for Environmental Responsibility (AFER) by Richard A. Fineberg, an Alaska researcher whose first reporting on TAPS dates to the construction of the pipeline in the mid-1970s. The report will be issued during the second week of June.

Based on field observations and supported with documentation from the official records dealing with TAPS operations during the past five years, the new, 130-page AFER report:

- identifies issues and events that constitute substantive basis for concerns about the condition of the aging pipeline;
- describes the manner in which the TAPS Owners and, the Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. (the wholly-owned agent of the Owners) deal with these problems;
- reviews the oversight efforts and published reports of the Joint Pipeline Office (JPO), an umbrella group of 13 state and federal agencies that oversees TAPS;
- analyzes the unusual (and highly lucrative) economics of TAPS; and
- makes six recommendations that AFER believes will go a long way toward ensuring the public interest in the safe and environmentally responsible transport of oil across Alaska.

This report comes at a critical time: The federal government and the State of Alaska are now reviewing the application of the TAPS Owners to renew their 30-year federal right-of-way and state lease (Grant and Lease) agreements.

This report focuses on TAPS operations during the past five years and updates previous AFER status reports on TAPS (*Pipeline in Peril* [1996] and a shorter 1997 update are on-line at www.alaskaforum.org). The findings and conclusions are therefore based on recent operations rather than the history of this controversial pipeline system.