

STATEMENT OF THE STATUS OF SEWARD, ALASKA

AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT DISASTER

At approximately 5:36 P.M. on the evening of March 27, 1964, Seward was rocked for two minutes and fifty-six seconds by a very severe earthquake. While the earthquake was still rocking, some of the Standard Oil storage tanks and also the Texaco storage tanks exploded, caught fire and were blazing, sending off columns of black smoke. Seconds after the quake had subsided, sections of the waterfront caved off into deep water in the bay, causing a splash wave which inundated a small portion of the city. The entire area of the waterfront immediately started burning (both Standard and Texaco storage tanks were immediately adjacent to the waterfront), and the water in Resurrection Bay was covered with burning petroleum products for about a half mile out into the bay.

Residents of Seward (a city of approximately 1,800 people, with a total area population of around 3,000) had been warned that if an earthquake should happen, there would probably be a tidal wave or waves. They immediately started for safe, high ground.

Approximately fifteen to twenty minutes after the earthquake, a tidal wave raised in the bay about a mile and a half from the city limits, off Lowell Point, and came crashing toward the city. The crest of the wave carried a solid wall of burning petroleum product. This 37-foot high wave thundered into the area at the head of the bay, occupied by the City of Seward and its surrounding communities and the airport at Seward. There were repeated lesser waves up to eleven o'clock that night. Meanwhile, the fires were still burning.

At the time of the preparation of this statement, Seward is still being shaken by lesser earthquakes, and is now having some damage from high tides.

It would appear from cursory examination that Seward has settled approximately $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet lower than it was before the earthquake. This would probably be from a tilting of the entire general area, rather than a settling of Seward proper. Competent geologists are now in Seward and will make an evaluation to determine what has happened to our soil structure and to the general area.

As a result of the fire, Seward lost most of the oil storage tanks owned by Standard Oil Company and Texaco Company, the electric generation plant owned by the City of Seward, and three residences. There is some question at this time, but it would appear that most of Seward's City-owned industrial area in the San Juan Dock district was on fire when it fell into the bay.

Seward has lost by earthquake the Standard Oil docks, the Army dock, portions of The Alaska Railroad dock, the San Juan dock area, the Small Boat Harbor, and most of the trackage between Seward proper and the waterfront, occupied by The Alaska Railroad.

We also had damage to 261 homes, with 86 homes either completely demolished or made unsalavagable by either the earthquake or the tidal waves.

Seward lost as a result of the tidal waves its entire fishing fleet, valued in excess of \$2,000,000 and composed of over one hundred vessels; The Alaska Railroad dock facilities and warehouses; two of the three gantry cranes on the dock; six square blocks of residential area; and the parking strip at the airport. There was extensive damage to the water and sewer system, and to the electric system.

We have been fortunate in being able to restore electric service to the City on a temporary basis over the lines from Cooper Lake generating plant, but have been advised this morning by the Corps of Engineers, U.S. Engineer District, Alaska, that it appears that the main structure across Kenai Lake is failing. This is a major structure and its failure would make service to Seward by electricity impossible. With the entire loss of the Seward generating plant, it is imperative that emergency generation facilities for the welfare of the community be brought in immediately.

The water system was restored to the community and continual checks are being made on its health safety. Two of the three City wells have been destroyed, the well for the Seward General Hospital has been destroyed, and the major supply line into the City has been fractured in many places.

The sewer outfalls for the City sewers were destroyed, but the sewers appear to be draining into the bay. We anticipate that when the frost goes out of the ground in the Spring, we will find hundreds of leaks in the water and sewer lines that are classified now as "hair-line" leaks, but will show up when the restraining frozen soil around them is released by frost going out of the ground.

Three members of the Seward City Council had the City government in session within thirty minutes of the time the quake occurred. The City government was commenced and is now operating out of the basement of the City-owned Seward General Hospital. The building formerly occupied by the City and State for offices is unsafe for use. The Civil Defense Department of the City was organized as a branch of City government, and is a department of City government, with the City Manager being Civil Defense Director in Seward and the Seward area. This department was organized with various persons in the community responsible for certain functions, such as feeding, housing, etc. Civil Defense commenced functioning immediately after the earthquake and is still in operation. It will be some time before the community can return to normal because of the tremendous amount of debris and the terrific loss to its residents.

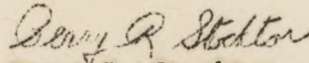
At this time it is estimated that the loss to the community has been over \$2,000,000 to our fishing fleet, loss of 86 homes, 261 homes damaged, the entire industrial area completely destroyed, with no jobs available now in Seward other than cleanup and reconstruction jobs. Most of the houses are still standing, and emergency repair crews have repaired flues and chimneys to make the houses capable of occupancy.

Our people are in high spirits, the morale is good, and we are returning the City to normal as fast as possible.

There remains one basic thing to the community, and that is the reconstruction and rebuilding of The Alaska Railroad and The Alaska Railroad docks. Other industries, such as Standard Oil Company, Texaco Oil Company, Halibut Producers Co-Op, Alaska Barite Company, and Gateway Smelters have all stated their desire to rebuild in Seward, but these are all contingent upon the rebuilding of the Railroad facilities.

We are being supplied now from the air, by Air National Guard and the military through Civil Defense, for our necessities, and are making arrangements for some barging services to come into Seward to service the Kenai Peninsula. The highway to Kenai and Soldotna is open. It is anticipated the highway between Seward and Anchorage will be open by the first of June.

The purpose of this statement is to clarify the position of Seward at the present time.


Perry R. Stockton
Mayor
City of Seward
Seward, Alaska

Foregoing Statement prepared:
April 14, 1964