

U.S. Rejects Proposal on Pipeline Welds

Washington

The U.S. Interior Department has rejected as inadequate the Alaska oil pipeline company's plan for checking on the reliability of hundreds of welds in the 800-mile line.

The plan offered by the Alyeska Pipeline Service Co. is either "incomplete or silent" in at least three ways proposed for detecting which of the welds are faulty, Undersecretary D. Kent Frizzell told the company in a letter.

His letter was released at a news conference yesterday in which Interior Secretary Thomas Kleppe acknowledged that the welding problems could mean a delay in completing the pipeline, which is to carry oil from Alaska's North Slope to a terminal on the Southern coast.

"Later events will determine" whether a delay will occur, he said.

The pipeline was scheduled for completion in mid-1977.

The trouble lies in the company's inability to demonstrate that all of 3955 problem welds made in 1975 have been repaired. About 1300 still remain to be repaired, 600 to 900 of them in such critical areas as under rivers or the permafrost,



THOMAS KLEPPE
Secretary of the Interior

Kleppe said.

He reiterated the department's promise that "not one drop of oil will flow through the Alaska Pipeline until it has been thoroughly tested and we are assured of (its) integrity."

Records kept by both Alyeska and the Interior Department's Anchorage office have been found to be incomplete. Verifying the soundness of hundreds of welds is extremely difficult.

The company so far has relied on X-rays to detect faults, but Kleppe said that 45 to 109 X-rays are missing. An independent auditing firm hired by the Interior Department found the verification system inadequate.

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