

## **Lost Pigs on TAPS – Alaska News Nightly (Statewide News – 3:28 Transcript)**

### **Analyst Alleges Mismanagement Of TAPS**

**By Dan Bross, KUAC – Fairbanks Thursday, January 03, 2013 5:18 PM**

**Lori Townsend (Host):** A new report by independent oil industry analyst Richard Fineberg alleges mismanagement of the Trans Alaska Pipeline. It centers on recent years incidents in which pigs, mechanical devices used to inspect and clean the inside of the pipeline, failed to show up where operators expected. KUAC's Dan Bross Reports.

**Dan Bross:** Richard Fineberg has been analyzing pipeline operations for decades, so when something unusual happens, he takes note. His latest report cues on incidents in November 2010 and May of last year in which cleaning pigs went off-track into non-mainline relief piping. Fineberg says the unpublicized incidents are serious.

**Richard Fineberg:** If the pig gets lost in the line, a pig can do damage. These have gone into the pressure relief system, off of the Brooks Range and off of Thompson Pass. That's very serious for pipeline operations.

**Bross:** Alyeska is having to run more pigs to keep the pipeline clear of wax buildup caused by reduced oil throughput. Alyeska spokeswoman Michelle Egan says the Brooks Range and Thompson Pass pig incidents were very different. Egan says the November 2010 missing pig recovered at Pump Station 5 followed a shutdown prompted by a false spill report.

**Michelle Egan:** When we shut down immediately, we did not take time to consider where our pig was located, because protecting the environment was the greater concern. But when we re-started, the pressure change caused that pig to get pulled into the relief system. In the other event, the wax cloud pushed in front of the pig, caused a pressure change and that opened up our relief system and the pig was drawn into the relief system, instead of the pig trap, where it should have gone.

**Bross:** Egan says any damage to the pipeline's pressure relief system did not affect Alyeska's ability to operate it. Joint Pipeline Office Bureau of Land Management officer Ron Dunton also downplays the lost pig issue.

**Ron Dunton:** We're well aware of it. Alyeska informs us of an event like this immediately. But it did not rate, rise by any stretch of imagination to a crisis. The result issue, without any event in terms of, uh, damage to the pipeline, we're still in shape.

**Bross:** Alyeska's Egan says the company is trying to eliminate the problem of wax pushed ahead of pigs triggering relief valves. She said it's done by over-riding an automated detection system and manually listening for pigs.

**Egan:** In the medical field you would probably equate it to a stethoscope. You can put that up against the pipeline itself and hear the pig arrival.

**Bross:** Fineberg's report tracks missing pigs back to the year 2000, including a case where a pig broke apart inside a pipe and lists the problem among several pipeline operational problems he says point to a common need.

**Fineberg:** Learning from near misses and other accidents, so that you don't repeat mistakes.

**Bross:** Fineberg says the wax buildup that's requiring more pig runs is a problem that was anticipated before the pipeline began operation, and heating the oil is the obvious cure.

**Fineberg:** Speculatively, from the fact that they haven't installed the heat to do that, they don't want to spend the money.

**Bross:** Alyeska's Egan counters that the company is warming oil with friction by recirculating it through pipeline pump stations. She says lower pipeline throughput also means oil propelling cleaning pigs is moving more slowly, and that requires more of the mechanical devices to do the job. In Fairbanks, I'm Dan Bross.