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News Story

January 22, 1969

BIKINI CLEAN-UP TO START SOON

Saipan (MNS)--U.S. Atomic Energy Commission and Department of Defense have jumped into action to get the Bikini rehabilitation moving as quickly as possible. Col. John Schott of the AEC visited Saipan Tuesday, January 21, to arrange transportation for an eight-man survey team to begin clearing the Eneu Island airstrip on Bikini Atoll. Unfortunately, the Trust Territory ships in the Marshalls are now tied up with typhoon relief efforts. Other possible means of transportation are being explored.

According to Deputy High Commissioner Martin P. Mangan, the Atomic Energy Commissioner has several hundred thousand dollars which must be spent before the end of fiscal year 1969 or before July 1, 1969. The total of AEC and Defense Department funds available at this time is understood to be in the vicinity of \$600,000. The cost of cleaning out the dangerous structures, debris and radioactive iron is estimated by the AEC's contractor, Homes and Narver, to be \$1,200,000. The entire return to Bikini will cost about \$3,200,000. Former President Johnson requested \$1.7 million in his budget message last week, but the fact that other money is now available will mean Bikini rehabilitation can start at least six months earlier than previously planned.

One of the first jobs to be done on Bikini is to clear 400 feet of the Eneu airstrip so that short-takeoff-and-landing

aircraft of the Kwajalein Missile Range can land to bring in initial supplies and manpower. The logistics of shipping heavy equipment and supplies reportedly have been arranged for by the military. The AEC has planned 13 weeks for mobilization of the clean-up, but they expect it can be done faster.

Director of Community Development, Fran Mahoney said that twelve to twenty Bikinians from Kili Island would be needed by the end of February.

The AEC plans to start by removing the radioactive scrap and dumping it at sea. The huge rusting towers would be demolished as would any other unsafe structure and the cement bunkers would be repaired where cracked. The exact scope of the work is not clear at this time, but it is expected that there will be a considerable amount of brush clearing. The brush would be piled for compost, or burned.

While the future financing of the Bikini return is not clear, Trust Territory officials appear to be delighted that the first step will soon be taken.

In other preparations for the return to Bikini, Dr. Robert A. Conard is preparing to do baseline studies on the Bikini people so that the amount of radiation accumulated after their return can be measured. Dr. Conard, of the Brookhaven National Laboratory, has been responsible for the continuing observation of the Rongelap people since their exposure to radioactivity fifteen years ago.

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While a few Bikinians may return soon, it must be remembered that the atoll will not be able to support a sizeable population for six or more years.

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