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More information Bruce Kato, Chief Curator, Alaska State Museums, Division of Libraries, Archives and Museums, 465-1313; Harry Gamble, Information Officer, 465-2851

Water Leak At State Office Building Closes Library *Staff Working to Save Damaged Books*

Juneau--An overnight water line breakage soaked the Alaska State Libraries circulating section Wednesday causing damage to books and closing the circulating library for an indefinite period.

The circulating library will be closed until further notice. Those needing to contact the circulating library for services can call 465-2929.

The circulating section is located on the eighth floor of the State Office Building in Juneau. The Alaska Historical Library, also located on the eighth floor, but on the opposite side of the building, suffered no damage.

The staff arrived at the library Wednesday morning to find two inches of standing water on the library floor and an area of about 25 feet by five rows of books damaged, according to Bruce Kato, Chief Curator of the Alaska State Museums. Library management sent a dozen staff members home.

Another six employees from the State Library and another six from the State Museums were removing books and assessing damage throughout the day Wednesday. Library personnel who were sent home Wednesday will return to the Historical Library Thursday.

Soaked ceiling tiles containing asbestos fell to the floor, causing further damage to valuable books, offices and equipment. A private contractor was assessing asbestos contamination in the air Wednesday afternoon, Kato said.

“Once we get air quality clearance from the asbestos, we will move everything, including all damaged and undamaged books and other material and equipment from the circulating library to the atrium of the State Office Building,” Kato said. Two museum staff members are certified in treating asbestos contaminated artifacts. Other material in the library includes periodicals and office equipment such as computers.

“The biggest concern at the moment,” Kato said, “is the high humidity environment, including a soaked carpet. We’re trying to avert mold damage. We eventually are looking at drying out damaged books and wrapping them.” That work will need to be done at the State Museum, he said. Kato expected to eventually take the most seriously damaged books to the Alaska State Museum in Juneau for treatment and restoration.

Kato praised the Library and Museum staff members who were working at the Library. “We’re going to be here until nine or 10 tonight. Everybody is doing a good job,” Kato said.

Kato is available at 465-1313.

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