

**Engineer can't find support for cyclotron -- Anchorage Officials will recommend against installing it in downtown home office.**

*Innovative thinking at least.*

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An engineer who wants to produce radioactive medical tracers at a home office downtown lost in the first go-round on Monday. The Planning and Zoning Commission recommended that the city not allow it.

The engineer, Al Swank, wants to install a circular accelerator called a cyclotron in one of two houses he owns along the Delaney Park Strip, to make a radioactive isotope. The material is injected into patients to detect cancer and is used with PET scanners. PET stands for positron emission tomography.

Right now, none of this material is made in Alaska. It is flown in on weekdays from the Seattle area.

Swank's plan to make it locally stirred up neighbors, prompted the state Department of Health and Social Services to rush through some emergency regulations, and prompted Anchorage Assemblyman Allan Tesche to propose a municipal law banning the use of cyclotrons in residential areas.

Some fear the cyclotron would be unsafe -- which Swank and some other experts say isn't likely. Others argue that it would be an industrial business and as such should be located at a hospital or in an industrial zone, not next to other houses and across the street from a park.

The plan has also attracted the attention of the FBI, said Swank and one of his neighbors.

Veronica Martinson, who lives nearby, said FBI agents visited her house twice to ask what she knew about the cyclotron, and about Swank. "They came and asked questions, then they sent another dude posing as a mailman," said Martinson.

"Albert is a good neighbor," Martinson said. "I don't know anything about Albert's background, and if I did, I wouldn't tell them anyway. If he ain't blowing up the neighborhood, it doesn't worry me."

An FBI spokesman did not return calls Tuesday.

The Planning Commission voted unanimously to support Tesche's ordinance, which would disallow cyclotrons as home businesses. The Anchorage Assembly may take up the issue next Tuesday.

"The (existing) home occupation ordinance makes it pretty clear that home occupations should be incidental," said Meg Simonian, one of the commissioners. "It's supposed to be something that's sort of unnoticed and doesn't disturb the residential quality of that neighborhood," she said in a phone interview.

"I asked, 'Give me an example of a cyclotron in a residential neighborhood,' and he couldn't," Simonian said.

Swank operates a civil engineering business. He also consults nationally and internationally on cyclotrons, the particle accelerators used to create radioactive isotopes. Swank built his first one as a West High School science student.

He plans to get a used cyclotron from Johns Hopkins University, and said it is due to arrive in April. He wants to use the accelerator to fulfill a medical need but also would like to employ it as a teaching tool for science classes, he said.

Anchorage School Superintendent Carol Comeau let him know she wouldn't be allowing any classes to visit until all legal issues are cleared up, a district spokesman said.

But she also suggested Swank contact the curriculum department to talk about what he might do for the schools.

City planner Jerry Weaver said Swank seems to be knowledgeable about cyclotrons, and appears to be well-intentioned. But the city administration opposes allowing him to use the cyclotron in one of his houses. "The majority of the people in the planning department just don't think it's an appropriate use in a neighborhood," he said.