



UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
 REGIONAL OFFICE
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 DENVER, COLORADO 80211



110574

SEP 13 1979

Letter on form #163

Mr. Glen Bean, Regional Director
 National Park Service
 655 Parfet Street
 Lakewood, Colorado 80215

AGC00003



Dear Mr. Bean:

As you know our office is currently conducting a review of National Park Service concessions management at the request of the Subcommittee on Parks, Recreation, and Renewable Resources, Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. In reviewing the health and safety of concessioner operations at Yellowstone National Park we noted several reports and memoranda prepared by the Park Service, or consultants hired by the Park Service, during the period August 1974 through January 1979, and memoranda concerning the structural integrity and safety aspects of concessioner operated facilities, and point out that severe fire, safety and structural deficiencies exist in several concessioner operated facilities--most notably the Old Faithful Inn and the Lake Hotel. One report, prepared by the National Park Service's Denver Service Center, states that the deficiencies they found at the lodges--each with the capability to house about 1,000 persons--endanger the life safety of visitors and employees.

On August 21, 1979, we met with Mr. John Townsley, Yellowstone National Park Superintendent, to discuss the noted deficiencies and to question whether the lodges should continue to operate if corrective action had not been taken. Mr. Townsley declined to comment on the specific fire and safety deficiencies discussed in the reports, but indicated that the concessioner had taken steps to correct some of the problems. He also declined to comment on the specific action taken by the concessioner.

National Park Service documented follow-up indicates that the concessioner has corrected some of the identified deficiencies, but severe problems continue to exist. Mr. Townsley stated that he has sole authority to close concessioner operated facilities in the Park for health and safety reasons, and has decided to allow the concessioner to continue operating the two lodges regardless of the uncorrected fire and safety problems. He said that in his opinion some of the problems are not as severe as indicated in the reports.

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Due to the serious nature of the reported deficiencies, on September 5, 1979, we had two highly qualified experts--a building inspector and fire inspector--conduct an independent evaluation of the Old Faithful Inn and Lake Hotel. This inspection using the Uniform Building Code and Uniform Fire Code, confirmed the existence and seriousness of the deficiencies cited in the prior reports. They found that the lodges did not comply with minimum and basic requirements of the standard codes, and that each structure has a number of critical fire and safety hazards. It is their professional opinion that the lodges are "unsafe for use as a residential occupancy, continued use as such could result in a tragedy". A copy of their inspection report is enclosed.

We believe the Park Service should immediately take action necessary to protect the life and safety of visitors and employees at the Old Faithful Inn and Lake Hotel.

Because of seriousness of the fire and safety deficiencies noted by Park Service personnel and our inspectors, we would like a reply from you by September 17, 1979, as to the corrective actions you have taken.

Sincerely yours,

John E. Murphy

CR/jh

Robert W. Haulon
Regional Manager

cc: Mr. William J. Whalen, Director
National Park Service
Mr. John Townsley, Superintendent
Yellowstone National Park
Mr. Raymond Johnston
Yellowstone Park Company