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Media Contact: Nedra Darling, OPA-IA Phone: 202-219-4152
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A complete do-it-yourself house planning service has been packaged by the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs to accelerate "mutual help" housing projects on Indian reservations, Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall announced today.

"The new service is expected to step up housing on the reservations to a 1,500 units-a-year pace," Udall said. He termed it "the most important move yet n Interior's campaign to offer Indian families an opportunity for decent, safe and sanitary housing--a 'must' if the reservation Indian is to adjust to modern day America and compete on an equal basis with other citizens."

Since programs of the Public Housing Administration became available to Indian reservations in 1961, tribes have established 73 housing authorities to handle contracts for low-rent projects and individual homes. The mutual-help program was launched by BIA and FHA in 1962. It enables Indians with incomes below the ordinary PHA minimum requirements to contribute their own labor and land as down payment on their homes.

"The mutual-help idea has proved very popular with the tribes," Udall said. The new packaged plans, already approved by PHA, will help accelerate the program by simplifying the design problem which often was a delaying factor in getting the program underway, he explained.

"Low-rent housing projects have been of great help to Indian tribes and more are needed," Udall said. "But many Indians cannot afford to pay even the low rental figure and most of them want to own their homes. The mutual-help program enables them to substitute time and labor for cash, and to help themselves acquire a decent home with low monthly payments."

Udall pointed out that the housing program is a major factor in improving living conditions among some 60,000 Indian families, who are now living in overcrowded, unsafe and unsanitary dwellings.

"We are aware that mutual help is not an easy way to build a house," Udall stressed. "It requires an enormous effort and much persistence by the Tribal Housing Authority and the individual Indian workers, but we feel the program offers many benefits. Not only will Indians raise their standard of living; they will experience e pride of ownership and a sense of accomplishment which justifies the entire effort."

With the packaged plans, prospective Indian homeowners will have 44 variations of a standard floor plan to choose from, each designed to blend well with the landscape on any reservation. Exteriors include concrete block, frame and adobe, with foundation plans also varying to suit the section of country. Concrete block will be used mainly in parts of the West and Southwest, and well-insulated frame construction will be used in northern States. The adobe house was designed especially for areas accustomed to this type of architecture.

Each home will have three bedrooms, kitchen, dining area, living room and bath. The enclosed area contains 916 square feet of floor space.

The package comes complete with a step-by-step construction manual and list of materials. PHA makes loans to a tribal housing authority for the purchase of materials and the employment of skilled labor where needed. BIA organizes the projects and supervises all construction.

Officials estimate that the value contributed by the Indian families through their labor and land will average about 15 to 20 percent of the value of the house. The homeowner will pay his own utilities and be responsible for maintenance.

Projects are coordinated with the Public Health Service, providing for adequate water and sewerage disposal facilities at each location.

At present, 300 mutual-help homes are under construction on 23 reservations, with 1,100 additional units to be started during the spring and summer of 1966. The States where tribes have begun mutual-help projects are Arizona, Montana, New Mexico, Alaska, California, Nevada, Utah, Idaho and Washington.

The program is expected to result in twice as many mutual-help homes being built by Indians next year as during the last four years combined.

BIA has requested that the Public Housing Administration reserve funds for several thousand Indian units--low-rent and mutual-help--under the Public Housing Act of 1965. This is in addition to the 3,300 authorized under the previous Act. The majority of the units probably will be built under the mutual-help plan, BIA officials said.