

Villages need law enforcement help

State law enforcement and justice agencies should take steps to ensure that their employees receive training which will give them a better understanding of Native cultures, traditions, and problems, according to a recent University of Alaska study.

The study, a report of which was presented to the Alaska Criminal Justice Planning Agency, covered 56 Native villages in Alaska. The report was written by Dr. John E. Angell, associate professor of justice at the university's Criminal Justice Center.

Angell said many of Alaska's villages are virtually invisible to the criminal justice agencies of the state and that residents there are in greater danger of accidental death or injury, homi-

cide, assault, rape and suicide than are resident of urban areas.

Most villages have to rely on the Alaska State Troopers in serious matters, but often help does not come for several hours or even days, Angell's study revealed. Many villages do not have adequate means of emergency communications and, in some instances, have to use the mail to signal their need for help.

Troopers are rarely seen except in emergency situations, but representatives of other criminal justice agencies are seen even less often, said the study.

Magistrates of the Alaska Court System, one of the most visible presences in rural Alaska, though highly regarded in the villages where they reside, do

not have the means to regularly visit surrounding areas. About 25 per cent of the villages studied do not have village police officers. In those that do, not enough of the officers have received formal training from the state. And, most of the villages do not have the large sources of income to attract and keep qualified officers.

Dr. Angell emphasized that there are several distinct Native cultures in Alaska and each must be considered individually by state criminal justice and social services agencies in dealing with Natives in different areas of the state. Also, records for Native villages are inadequate when compared to the urban areas of the state, Angell said.

"The levels of support and services currently being provided these communities and their residents are neither equal to those performed by the state in urban areas nor, in some cases, such as response village emer-

gencies, sufficient to meet the standards which citizens of American society have a right to expect," Angell said.

Residents of the villages studied requested better education and assistance in understanding the operations of the state's criminal justice agencies and a better understanding of the Native cultures by the state agencies.

Among the recommendations made in the report were that the Criminal Justice Planning Agency, in cooperation with the Department of Community and Regional Affairs and Native organizations, should establish regional guidance committees for justice planning and that action be taken to increase the visibility of public safety and justice situations in rural communities.

The report recommended also that state justice agencies increase their employment of Alaska Natives and ensure that Natives are placed in professional and policy level positions.