

Law supports Guard, Reserve service

by Barbara Crane

Tundra Times reporter

Alaska National Guard and Reserve members must not be penalized for time spent serving their country.

That's the law, and the Alaska Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve wants to be sure everyone knows it.

"Under the Veterans' Re-employment Rights law, when a Guard or Reserve member completes his military duty, he must receive his regular civilian job back," said Dan Travis, state director of the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service. He spoke at an ESGR meeting last week.

"If the company isn't able to absorb both the returning employee and a replacement that may have been hired in his absence, the replacement must go."

Additionally, the law says the reservist or Guard member must receive all the seniority, status, vacation time, paid holidays, opportunities for promotion and any other benefits he would have earned if he had not been away on military duty.

It is also illegal to discriminate against or refuse to hire an employee

because of his or her military status.

"The Department of Defense and the Department of Labor fully realize that a call-up or drills and training can really be hard on a small employer with two or three employees," Travis said, "but the law still applies in those cases."

The law also applies whether the employee is on active duty, off for basic or advanced training or participating in regular weekend drills and yearly exercises.

"If they have a set of orders telling them to go, their employment rights are guaranteed," said Col. Jerry Gilleen, executive director of ESGR.

But when Guardsmen or reservists must take time off for their military duties, problems and misunderstandings with their civilian employers often arise, and that's the number one reason given for quitting the Guard or Reserve.

The ESGR, made up of employers from all parts of Alaska, was formed to help smooth out those problems.

"We don't want people to quit the Guard or Reserve because they're afraid they'll lose their civilian jobs," said Tom Sweeney, state chairman of ESGR, "so we do a lot of talking and



a lot of negotiating and problems can generally be resolved."

ESGR encourages Guard and Reserve members to talk to their employers and fellow employees about their military duties and give them as much advance notice as possible when they need time off.

"We don't really have the problems in Alaska that other states have," Sweeney said. "Alaskan employers have a good attitude and are tremendously supportive."

But when questions or problems arise, Travis and ESGR committee

members all said they hoped employers and employees would call on them.

"Some of the areas are grey and technical, and an employer can't be expected to know all the ins and outs, so we want to talk," Travis said.

Travis' office in Juneau can be reached at 465-2723.

ESGR committee members may also be contacted by employers and employees in their regions:

- Kodiak: Tom Sweeney, 486-3101.
- Anchorage: Tom Anderson, 279-1029.
- Nome: Ron Engstrom, 443-2588.
- Fairbanks: Harold Hume, 479-1065.
- Skagway: Eugene McNamara, 983-2240.
- Bethel: Don Shantz, 543-2481.