

Developed to keep track of nonresident workers, it serves other purposes as well

During the economic boom that accompanied the building of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline in the 1970s, the state witnessed a large influx of nonresident workers. Despite relatively high unemployment rates among Alaska residents, nonresident workers were taking many high paying jobs that could have been filled by Alaska residents. This resulted in a simultaneous increase in employment and unemployment in Alaska.

As oil dollars supported massive publicly funded construction projects in the early 1980s, the Alaska Legislature asked the Department of Labor to enforce resident hire on these projects, collect information to support this effort and to report annually on nonresidents working in Alaska. The goal was to increase resident hire, reduce unemployment, identify industries and occupations with large numbers of nonresident workers, and find resident workers that have skills required for publicly funded projects.

In order to determine the number of resident and nonresident workers in particular occupations, the Alaska Occupational Database (ODB) system was developed.

Size of the database

The ODB contains occupation and place of work information on each employed wage and salary worker covered by unemployment insurance in Alaska. About 18,000 Alaska employers report wages for employees during any given quarter.

Alaska has approximately 350,000 employer/worker combinations per quarter. Because workers may hold multiple jobs in a quarter, this file is not directly comparable to average monthly employment figures reported by the department. The file identifies the types of work employees are performing and the skills that employers need. Occupation and place of work information is available for more than 90 percent of all unemployment insurance wage records.

Authority to collect data

The authority of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (AKDOL) to collect data stems from Alaska law which authorizes it to adopt regulations necessary to administer the law and requires employers to comply. Further regulations require employers to file a quarterly contribution report and wage schedule to AKDOL. For each employee, the report includes, among other things: name, social security number, occupational code or title, place of work location code, and total wages paid during the calendar quarter. Occupations may be submitted using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes or by supplying a descriptive title. The ODB system also maintains data on employers (i.e., employer name, industry classification, wages paid per quarter, etc.).

Database mechanics

If an employer reports an occupational title, those titles are converted to valid SOC codes using an

1 Top Five Occupations by Worker Count For selected areas—2001

Geographic Area	Occupational Title	Occupational	
		Count of Workers ¹	Wages (\$millions) ²
North Slope Borough	Roustabouts, Oil and Gas	1,278	\$47.4
North Slope Borough	Operating Engineers & Other Construction Equip. Operators	1,210	42.6
North Slope Borough	Construction Laborers	1,055	15.8
North Slope Borough	Office Clerks, General	640	10.3
North Slope Borough	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	609	5.3
Fairbanks North Star Borough	Office Clerks, General	2,477	22.0
Fairbanks North Star Borough	Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	2,378	4.5
Fairbanks North Star Borough	Retail Salespersons	2,338	16.4
Fairbanks North Star Borough	Waiters and Waitresses	1,856	5.9
Fairbanks North Star Borough	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	1,529	12.7
Municipality of Anchorage	Retail Salespersons	10,757	95.7
Municipality of Anchorage	Office Clerks, General	8,042	85.2
Municipality of Anchorage	Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	6,739	21.1
Municipality of Anchorage	Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	5,109	50.0
Municipality of Anchorage	Waiters and Waitresses	4,771	26.2
Juneau Borough	Office Clerks, General	1,163	11.2
Juneau Borough	Retail Salespersons	1,149	7.3
Juneau Borough	Child Care Workers	990	1.7
Juneau Borough	Cashiers	677	3.6
Juneau Borough	Waiters and Waitresses	674	2.1
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	Retail Salespersons	1,470	11.8
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	1,168	4.5
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	Construction Laborers	1,088	8.3
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	Teachers and Instructors, All Other	1,020	**
Matanuska-Susitna Borough	Office Clerks, General	840	8.3
Kenai Peninsula Borough	Seafood Processing Workers, Except Surimi and Fish Roe	1,985	6.1
Kenai Peninsula Borough	Retail Salespersons	1,346	9.7
Kenai Peninsula Borough	Combined Food Preparation & Serving Workers, Incl. Fast Food	1,225	2.9
Kenai Peninsula Borough	Waiters and Waitresses	1,026	3.6
Kenai Peninsula Borough	Teachers and Instructors, All Other	962	**

1. Worker count may overstate employment in that workers holding multiple jobs are counted more than once, and multiple workers holding the same job (turnover) are counted multiple times.

2. Wages are suppressed when more than 50 percent of the workers are employed by the same employer.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

extensive industry-specific crosswalk system. Custom crosswalks have also been developed in support of major Alaska employers. Titles or codes not recognized as a SOC code are checked against these special files developed in cooperation with larger employers. Early in the process of establishing the ODB system, AKDOL worked with large employers to develop these tables for automating the reporting process. The employer crosswalk enables employers to set up a table with their own company's codes for job classifications. This crosswalk enables employers to continue to use classifications already established in their organization for coding of employees and allows the ODB unit to automatically recode the employer classifications to the correct SOC. While requiring some effort on the front end, this has proven effective for the department, a time-saver for employers, and it makes the data more accurate.

Uses for ODB data

Although the ODB data is used primarily for the preparation of the annual resident hire report and in the enforcement of resident hire on publicly funded construction projects, a wide variety of labor market questions can be answered by this database. For instance:

- What is the percentage of female workers in a particular occupation?
- Do students exiting training programs find employment in an occupation related to their course of study?
- Which occupations have a large percentage of nonresident workers? (suggesting that a training program could help fill the need with Alaska residents)
- What are the highest paying occupations available in rural Alaska?
- Which occupations are year round occupations?
- How many workers in a particular borough or census area actually live in another part of the state?
- What occupations provide the majority of the wage income in an area?
- How much of an area's economy hinges on a particular occupation?

Looking at the leading occupations around the state gives a feel for regional differences in the state's economy. Exhibit 1 lists the top five occupations by worker count for several areas of the state. For the North Slope Borough, the leading occupation by both worker count and wages is Roustabouts, who earned more than \$47 million in wages for calendar year 2001. Other oil and gas-related construction occupations completed the North Slope's top five list. For the Fairbanks North Star Borough, the leading occupation is Office Clerk, followed by a mix of office, retail, and construction occupations. Fairbanks' largest occupation has nearly twice as many workers as that for the North Slope, but they earn less than half the total wages. For Anchorage, the top occupation by wages earned is Managers, while the largest number of workers are employed as Retail Salespersons. In Juneau, the top occupation by wages earned is General Managers, while the largest number of workers are employed as General Office Clerks.

To obtain a complete data set and to answer similar questions about your area, go to <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/research/research.html>.

Reports using ODB data

The Research and Analysis section produces several reports annually using the ODB data in conjunction with other proprietary databases (i.e., the Department of Revenue's Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) Division). These reports include: Resident Hire report, New Hires evaluation, Statewide Training and Employment Program (STEP) evaluation, Training Program Performance report, and articles on Gender Gap and Age Analysis. This is not the limit of uses for ODB data. Government leaders and consultants receive ODB data on an ad hoc basis as the need arises. For full report copies, visit <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/research/research/pub.htm>.

More information regarding occupation and geographic coding, and a complete set of codes can be found at <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/research/erg/occmanual.pdf>.