OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION IN ALASKA

In recent years, as more and more public attention has turned to the problems of unemployment, an ever increasing need for the development of occupational information has become evident. Government took its first real step toward controlling unemployment in the late 1930s when the Unemployment Insurance program was initiated to help tide unemployed people over during periods of unexpected unemployment and to stimulate cashflow by pumping funds back into the economy.

Unemployment insurance, however, did not assist the unemployed to learn new skills which may have been required for them to find employment. This need was recognized for many years by government but it was not until 1962 with the passage of the Manpower Development and Training Act (MDTA) that formal occupational training programs and subsidies were initiated. Since 1962 a multitude of other training and work experience programs have been sponsored by federal, State and local governments. In 1973, the federal government initiated the Concentrated Employment and Training Act (CETA). This Act brings many of these programs under one administrative body and more importantly transfers the planning and administration of training programs to State and local governments.

With the inception of CETA, there has been an increasing need for occupational data. These data are essential since manpower planners and educators must be able to project the number of potential job openings by occupation in order to design relevant training programs. Counselors and people making career decisions also need to know which occupations will be needed in the future so that they can guide clients adequately or prepare themselves for work that will actually be available.

In Alaska, the first venture into occupational information was part of the Alaska's Manpower Outlook 1970s study, abbreviated AMO70s. This project under joint sponsorship of the Department of Education and Labor, utilized an unstructured skill survey requesting current and projected occupational employment information. A great deal of valuable and useful information resulted from this survey but it soon became evident that a more refined on-going program for collecting occupational employment data would be necessary if the information were to remain relevant to the current economic situation. The nation as a whole has demonstrated its changeablility time and time again, and the State of Alaska particularly has had a history of volatile, difficult to predict, economic trends. At any rate, it stands to reason that what was true in 1970, with regard to occupational information, may not be true in 1974, and is even less likely to be valid in 1975 or 1976.

About three years ago, Alaska became one of the states participating in the Federal–State cooperative Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program. Information for this program is collected from employers on structured survey forms with specific job titles and job descriptions listed for the particular industry being surveyed. The various industries have been divided into broad industrial sectors and different sectors are surveyed throughout a three year cycle. The information collected is mathematically manipulated to produce statistically reliable estimates of current occupational employment.

The current estimates can be combined with information available from other sources, such as the 1970 decennial census, and through regression analysis occupational employment projections for the not-too-distant future can be made. An example of these estimates and projections appears in Table 1 which is an excerpt from a recent Research and Analysis Section publication, Occupational Demand.

Another aspect of occupational information involves some treatment of job opportunities. People who are planning their careers need to know what the jobs that are likely to be available to them consist of. They need to know what training and background they will need; as well as what the job actually is, where opportunities exist, how much they can expect to be paid, and whether promotional opportunities are likely. Discussions of this type are available now in booklets on Timber, Fishing, and Oil and Gas, recently published by the Research and Analysis Section.

TABLE 1
Estimates And Projections For Maintenance And Production Occupations

Occupational Title	1973 Total	1974 D&R**	1974 Total	1975 D&R**	1975 Total
MAINTENANCE, PRODUCTION OCC.	33,797		40,315		46,200
Carpenter	1,663	30	2,125	38	2,514
Heavy Equipment Operator	1,742	29	3,250	54	4,487
Electrician	692	13	716	14	747
Painter, Construction & Maint.	379	10	391	11	407
Plumber &/or Pipefitter	610	11	669	13	721
Machinist	226	7	243	8	262
Aircraft Mechanic	705	8	727	9	760
Auto Mechanic	1,262	11	1,619	14	1,945
Heavy Equipment Mechanic	1,098	16	1,385	20	1,638
Radio, TV Repairman	256	2	267	2	282
Maint. Man, General Utilitye	356	4	403	4	458
Electric, Power Lineman	274	2	283	2	292
Craneman, Derrickman, Hoistman	178	1	245	2	303
Stationary Engineer	370	5	389	5	411
Welder &/or Flamecutter	419	5	488	6	559
Gas Station Attendant	293	2	314	2	336
Laundry, Dry Clean Operator	263	11	287	12	321
Meat Cutter, Butcher	248	4	261	4	276
Bus Driver	493	12	520	13	556
Deliveryman &/or Routeman	631	7	677	7	728
Forklift, Towmotor Operator	235	3	248	3	260
Taxicab Driver, Chauffeur	254	7	264	8	276
Truck Driver	1,744	12	2,577	18	3,294

**The estimated job openings attributed to death and retirement.

There are, however, limits to the information that is available. For example no reliable data is presently available on the supply of persons which is currently able to fill the needs of shortage occupations identified by the OES program. Supply data are required to properly identify those occupations that will require entry level skills which most occupational training programs are geared to provide. The Department of Labor is aware of these limitations and will continue to improve its occupational research. It is anticipated that a more complete occupational series will be developed in the near future.