

Geological Survey Reinstates Seven After RIF

Calif. Employees To Get Back Pay

By Meg Walker
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The U.S. Geological Survey has reinstated seven employees who lost their jobs during a reduction in force last year.

The seven were among 36 people from the Menlo Park, Calif., office who are appealing their separations to the Merit Systems Protection Board.

Five of the seven are dropping their appeals. Two are continuing their appeals because they were offered jobs at lower grades, according to attorneys with Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a group representing the workers.

The seven will be reinstated with back pay, PEER attorneys said.
The agency "was forced to restore these employees because the justification for their removal lacked plausibility," said Mary Dryovage, the employees' attorney

in San Francisco. "We expect similar outcomes in all the remaining cases."

More than 500 people, about one-fourth of the agency's staff, lost their jobs last October in the largest RIF ever conducted by the agency.

Researchers and scientists, including some who had worked for the agency for decades, were laid off primarily at regional offices in Menlo Park, Denver and Reston, Va.

The RIF was controversial because of the way it was conducted. Most positions eliminated were put in one-person competitive levels, a classification usually used to group similar positions.

If a level has only one position, then the employee has no one to compete with if that one position is eliminated.

About 100 employees from the three offices appealed the RIF, saying the agency used single competitive levels to target certain people.

Officials have denied that any favoritism was used during the RIF.
Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., examined the

agency's RIF proceedings at a hearing by the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight.

Though nothing illegal was found, Mica warned other agencies not to pattern their RIFs after the one held by USGS.

Narrow competitive levels, Mica said, are unfair to employees.

Dryovage said the agency reinstated some employees to "save face."

Layoffs Needed to Make Spaces

Dryovage said the downside of the reinstatements is that some workers who hold positions at the agency will be laid off to make room for those who are returning.

Dean Anderson, a USGS spokesman, said the agency has rehired some people because it got more funding for 1997 and could fill vacant positions.

The agency also has been reviewing the MSPB claims, Anderson said.

"Anytime a RIF is run," Anderson said, "there's the possibility that you will make a decision and have overlooked informa-

tion, and it's natural for an agency to correct those things. This is exactly what the USGS is doing."

Ed Mankinen, a geologist who lost his job last fall, recently received a notice from the agency saying the layoff had been rescinded because an error had been made.

Mankinen, who had worked at the agency 32 years, said he had the most seniority of the geologists at his grade level working in the same specialty.

He plans to resume his position as a GS-14 in early July.

"I'm just glad it's over," he said. "I've been wallowing in this stuff for the last eight months. I'm sorry the Survey had to take this kind of action."

Others rehired are geologist Stephen Wolf, geophysicist Guy Cochran, Michael Fisher, Gretchen Luepke, Russell Eyras and Ed McKee, a geologist who has worked at the agency 31 years.

Most received reinstatement notices in May and will begin working sometime this summer.

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