

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ANDY JOSEPHSON

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 84: Workers' Compensation/Presumptive Illness

First responders are exposed to a broad array of toxic chemicals daily in the course of their service to our communities. This level of exposure has been linked to increased risk of disease or disability among this sector of public servants. Under current Alaska law, the presumption of coverage for certain diseases or disabilities being caused by work only extends to certain firefighters. House Bill 84 (HB 84) has the core purpose of extending this presumption of coverage to emergency medical technicians, paramedics and peace officers.

Emergency medical technicians (EMTs), paramedics and peace officers face toxic exposure comparable to those faced by firefighters and often are present when responding to fire calls or when dealing with a mediation of other environmental contaminants. Since these professions face the same daily risks as firefighters, they deserve the same legal protections.

Additionally, HB 84 adds breast cancer to the diseases covered under Alaska's presumptive illness law. There is emerging evidence that breast cancer rates are significantly higher among female firefighters than the average population and that there are more instances of premenopausal breast cancer among these professional women. There is also evidence that many chemicals known to cause breast cancer form during thermal decomposition.

Finally, HB 84 extends coverage to professionals who entered active service prior to August 19, 2008 and who, having gone through all official work related medical examinations, did not show evidence of disease in their first seven years of service.

Passage of HB 84 will ensure that Alaska adequately protects the individuals who choose professions to protect Alaska. I encourage you to support this legislation and urge you to reach out to my office with any questions or concerns.