UAF stands by decision to return 1,200 pieces of incorrectly addressed mail

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FAIRBANKS — The University of Alaska Fairbanks is standing by a decision to return roughly 1,200 pieces of mail that were sent to employees as part of a union-organizing drive last month, saying the items weren’t properly addressed and were returned to the sender.

The mailers, sent by the Alaska State Employees Association, were delivered in bulk to the UAF chancellor’s office late last month. The items had the name of individual employees, but not their specific on-campus addresses, and arrived back at ASEA offices Nov. 28.

That decision prompted an angry response from ASEA organizer Sam Rhodes. He sent an email to UAF Mail Services and campus employees earlier this month, saying there was a “conscious decision” not to allow the mailing to reach staff employees. Similar mailers were delivered to more than 1,000 employees at UA’s Anchorage and Juneau campuses.

“Looking up addresses, where there are 12 or 1,200 for your customers — the UAF employees — is your job,” Rhodes wrote in an email to John Renfro of UAF Mail Services. “And you simply chose not to do it.”

Rhodes didn’t return calls to discuss the union’s concerns.

UAF spokeswoman Marmian Grimes said the Fairbanks campus post office was simply following its policy, which requires a more specific address be included for employees. She said the UAF post office is a contract facility — unlike those at the other campuses — and doesn’t have the same capacity to sort mail.

Grimes said deliveries to UAF employees require a building-level destination to help with the sorting process. Grimes said she didn’t know if exceptions to the policy had been made with previous mail deliveries.

UAF had its policy reviewed by an attorney, Grimes said, and the approach was deemed appropriate.

“The bottom line is we feel like the action of our campus post office was reasonable,” Grimes said.

Grimes said ASEA also has been provided with a list of employees being targeted by the organizing drive, which includes their home address.
It’s the latest development in a long, occasionally contentious relationship between the University of Alaska and ASEA, which has spent nearly two years working to unionize about 2,500 workers throughout the UA system. Those employees — mainly office workers at the various campuses — are the last major block of unrepresented workers at UA.

ASEA canceled a scheduled unionization vote in October 2010, saying it needed more time to counter a “very active negative campaign” by UA. University officials said their goal is simply working to deliver accurate information to employees during the process.

ASEA revived the effort in January, and has spent the year collecting union authorization cards. Thirty percent of workers in a proposed bargaining unit need to sign cards to trigger an election.

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