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Big Island call-up hurts labor force

HILO — Departure of more than 900 Big Island men in federalization of the National Guard and Army Reserve units will cause some dislocations in the labor picture here.

Nearly 800 men in four companies of the second battalion of the 200th infantry will report to Schofield Barracks next month, according to Lt. Col. Fred Koehnen, battalion commander.

And about 159 reservists will go with B Company of the 100th Infantry Battalion, a Reserve unit.

The sugar industry will be particularly hard hit, with about 100 men from the Brewer plantations alone.

Many Kona coffee farmers and hotel workers will be affected.

The County government will lose 40 men, nearly half from the Police and Fire Departments, and including third deputy County Attorney Paul De Silva, a helicopter pilot in the National Guard.

The Big Island labor situation was already tightening under pressure of new construction and the expanding resort industry.

And the 900-plus men who will be leaving next month will put a further dent in the total labor force, estimated by the State Department of Labor at 23,950 as of February.