

Gay TRW worker sues CIA over security clearance

By Norma Meyer
Staff writer

A 50-year-old TRW engineer sued the CIA on Monday, claiming the agency illegally revoked his top-secret security clearance when it discovered he is a homosexual.

John William Green said he had security clearance at the Redondo Beach company for 12 years and assumed the CIA knew his sexual preference the entire time.

"I felt the government knew about me because I have been openly gay all my life," he said in an interview.

Green, a former department manager who says he has been relegated to "paper shuffling" as a staff electronics engineer, filed suit in U.S. District Court asking that his security clearance be reinstated.

The CIA claims it did not discover Green is gay until two years ago, when his roommate, then a TRW Inc. employee was being screened for a security clearance.

Green said he was "very open" with a CIA investigator

doing a check on his roommate, and told the investigator during questioning that the two had a close, long-term relationship.

The same investigator later asked Green's roommate — who had since found a different job — and two other friends if the engineer is a homosexual and they all said yes. Within three weeks of the original interview, Green's five clearances for "special access programs" — some of the government's highest security ratings — were revoked without explanation, he said.

A few months later, the CIA sent a letter to Green "saying basically, the CIA has learned your sexual preference and since it is not revealed in our personnel files, you must be hiding the fact and hiding disclosure," said Green's attorney, John McDermott.

"They said since you must fear disclosure, you are potentially susceptible to coercion, blackmail and duress," the Century City lawyer said.

CIA officials refused comment on the legal action, but a spokeswoman said each case involving a non-agency member who receives clearance is "reviewed on its own merit." A spokeswoman for TRW, which was under the agency's jurisdiction for the clearance and was not named in the suit, also declined to comment.

Green said the CIA never directly asked about his sexual preference, but his lifestyle was no secret and co-workers in the company's Electronic and Defense Sector knew he was gay. On security forms he filled out three years ago, Green wrote down his membership in the largest gay ski club in Los Angeles, he said.

"I guess I had a great deal of faith in our government investigative process," the Silverlake resident said.

Green and his attorney said they will argue that the CIA's alleged policy against gays not only violates individual rights, but also endangers national security.

"If someone is homosexual and doesn't want it revealed, then he puts himself in the position of being blackmailed," McDermott said.

Green agrees: "If I had been a closet case, I'd have my department, I'd have my security clearance, I'd have a higher salary and I probably would be susceptible to blackmail.

"I know a lot of gay people at TRW and there's a lot of doors slamming — closet doors."

McDermott says TRW has remained neutral on the case, yet Green has been in a "dead-end" unclassified position since his clearance was revoked.

Ironically, McDermott adds, his client is a "flag-waving American, a believer in this country. He's a registered Republican and he supports Reagan.

"He also is fully in support of the CIA and its intelligence gathering activities."