

From: Eric Dee <ericd2458@hotmail.com>
To: <andrewt@dnfsb.gov>
Date: 7/18/2011 5:15 PM
Subject: comments

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to offer a public comment on the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) letter dated June 9, 2011, concerning the safety culture at the Hanford nuclear site. The Waste Treatment Plant is but one area of Hanford that is suffering from a hostile working environment and a chilling effect on employees on raising safety concerns. Until March of this year, I worked at the Hanford tank farms, where 53 million gallons of highly radioactive waste is stored in underground waste tanks.

My name is Eric E. Desmarais. I received employment on 09/24/2001 as a Heath Physics Technician (HPT) Trainee working at the Hanford K Basins, where nuclear spent fuel was stored. While working at K Basins I was directly involved in the operation readiness assessments for both the Spent Nuclear Fuel Transfer as well as the Sludge Removal System. Once becoming a senior HPT, I applied for and was selected as a Lead HPT at the minimum time requirement. While working at the K Basins I received many accolades for my attention to detail and strict adherence to the procedures. I then transferred to the Tank Farms where I worked for CH2MHILL until October 2008 when a new contractor, Washington River Protection Solutions (WRPS) was awarded the contract.

It was clear from the day WRPS took over that the questioning attitude that was once considered an asset was now looked upon as an inconvenience/hindrance to the completion of work and would not be tolerated. Workers that raised concerns were no longer assigned to work-evolutions that had monetary incentives attached. Workers that were willing to work with flawed procedures and look the other way with regard to other safety issues were considered team players. Even the simplest of issues could not be resolved utilizing the company's chain of command. In fact, at least one HPT was given a coaching letter and threatened with termination for issuing a Problem Evaluation Request (PER). I myself was asked to volunteer to work temporarily with the procedures group. This was done, in my opinion, in an effort to remove me from the field work being performed. It was for these reasons as well as several others I contacted DOE Employee concerns with regard to what I felt was a hostile work environment on or about June of 2009 Concern # 20090041.01. This concern was substantiated by DOE. However, the only

changes that were made as a result where reorganization and splitting the Base Operations Radiological control group into 5 separate teams responsible for minor maintenance and routines. A supervisor, who one time in the past, had told me "get the f*** out of my office, I am not f***ing kidding and shut the f***ing door," was reported to have done the same to several others. That supervisor had created a closed door policy. He was removed during the original reorganization, only to be brought back and given a promotion to Area Radiological Manager. The Manager I am referring to is Mr. Grant Bachaud.

I continued to issue Problem Evaluation Report's for me as well as for others that were afraid to issue them, while working with the procedure group. On or about October 2010 I was removed from the procedure group by the above mentioned Radiological Control Manager, due to what I felt was retaliation for continuing to raise valid concerns. I contacted Ed Kennedy (WRPS employee concerns) with what I felt was overwhelming evidence. His response seemed to minimize the seriousness of the allegation. He assured me "it was just a misunderstanding on Mr. Bachaud's part."

I continued to raise concerns. On or about March 9, 2011 myself, and three other HPT's were asked to report to company headquarters in Richland. When I asked my supervisor why, he replied he didn't know. When I arrived my union representative and I met with the company representatives, and I was told I was being suspended with pay pending an investigation. When I asked what I was accused of I was told all they could say was it had to do with a hostile work environment, and they would contact me if they needed during their investigation. I then contacted DOE employee concerns representative Bobby Williams and filed an employee concern due to what I felt was retaliation for bring forth issues. On about March 16, 2011 I was asked to report to the company headquarters, I was met there by my Union representative where I was asked approximately 4 questions, none of which I feel related to a circumstance that was grounds for termination. I was asked if I knew of a reason I would be accused of creating a hostile work environment. I said no, other than the fact that I follow procedures and have issued a stop work recently.

The above stated is just a brief synopsis; however, I have all the documentation to support a more detailed description.

On March 25, 2011 I was called again to report to company headquarters, this time my union representative and I met with the Radiological

control manager and a labor relation representative. I was then told I was being terminated due to substantiated complaints of hostile work environment. I asked the labor relations representative exactly what I was being accused of. His reply was that all he could say was that it had to do with a hostile work environment and I would receive specifics in the grievance process. I told the RadCon manager that was present that I was only doing what he had asked of me. Again I was told I would get the information in the grievance process. As of this date, neither I nor my union has received the investigative report utilized in the termination of myself and the three other HPT's. However, the company has been willing to share it with DOE, and the company President, Mr. Spencer, has commented to several individuals that what the four terminated HPT's had done "was so heinous we had to be removed." I find this ironic since none of the four of us have had the opportunity to answer to any specific allegations supposedly contained in this report. Not to mention I was told this investigation had been conducted over a three month period, prior to us being suspended.

It should be noted that myself and the three other HPT's were the individuals that raised concerns for others who were afraid to. It is also important to mention that the two HAMTC safety representatives that were vigilant in their duties were transferred from the base operation facility prior to our suspension and ultimately our termination. These actions created what can only be described as an extreme chilling effect. This can easily be substantiated by the drop in PER's and safety issues raised since our termination. There were approximately 40 employee concerns filed with DOE immediately after our terminations, by WRPS employees who agree we were obviously fired for bringing up safety concerns and issues. Subsequently, all those PERS were "unsubstantiated" in a matter of a few weeks, when normally they take several months or more to be investigated.

I find it alarming that the company can wrongfully terminate whomever they want, without due process, with the sole purpose of setting an example for those who raise safety concerns and essentially terrorizing the work force to facilitate speedy and unsafe completion of jobs associated with high financial reward.

Because DOE is responsible for repaying workers who are wrongfully terminated, the company suffers no penalty from wrongful terminations, creating a win-win situation for the company.

The DNFSB has it right when it says that workers are fearful of raising concerns at Hanford. The way that the contractor and the DOE have treated employees out here practically guarantees a chilled work environment. I

am very glad that the DNFSB has written this letter that calls out the truth of what is happening, and I hope that you expand your investigations and make recommendations about the tank farm safety culture as well.

I support the DNFSB's efforts to provide independent oversight at DOE, and the recommendations in its letter.

I would be happy to answer any questions. I can be reached at 509-840-3103 or 509-837-8983.

Sincerely,

Eric E Desmarais