



U.S. OFFICE OF SPECIAL COUNSEL

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December 2, 2008

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: OSC File No. DI-08-0177

Dear Mr. President:

The Office of Special Counsel received a whistleblower disclosure from Mr. David Lubbers, Jet Engine Mechanic, Department of the Navy (Navy), Fleet Readiness Center Southeast (FRCSE), Naval Air Station, Jacksonville, Florida. Mr. Lubbers, who consented to the release of his name, alleged that Navy employees were repairing jet engines and disposing hazardous material improperly and, consequently, creating a substantial and specific danger to public health and safety.

Mr. Lubbers' allegations were referred to the Honorable Donald C. Winter, Secretary of the Navy, to conduct an investigation into these disclosures pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 1213(c) and (d). On August 28, 2008, Secretary Winter submitted his agency report, which did not substantiate Mr. Lubbers' allegations.

While the agency report failed to substantiate the allegations, the investigation revealed that there were errors in how bearings were identified in Navy jet engine repair guidelines. The Secretary opined that these errors might have contributed to a misunderstanding about how mechanics were required to follow authorized procedures. Specifically, sections of the Navy manual on applicable repair and cleaning procedures "incorrectly identified afterburning variable exhaust nozzle rollers as if they were bearings."

The agency report further found that the Navy employs several jet engine cleaning processes. However, FRCSE utilizes an alternative, yet equivalent, method of cleaning the jet engines, which had been previously approved as a cost-effective method saving the government money. Specifically, FRCSE uses Blue Gold detergent, which has been approved as environmentally friendly and safe, and utilizes in-house FRCSE Engine Shop manual labor to perform the cleaning duties instead of sending engine parts, such as the fan stator vanes or blades, to a separate unit, the FRCSE Clean Shop, which is located in another building. Given that sending the engine parts to the FRCSE Clean Shop would dramatically increase the turn-around time, using FRCSE Engine Shop employees increases efficiency and saves money.

Mr. Lubbers provided comments on the agency report. He commended the investigators' professionalism. He also stated that the investigation produced a more receptive work environment among FRCSE employees who raise management and safety concerns and, as a result of safety inquiries, managers procured specialized tools to repair engines properly. However, Mr. Lubbers remains frustrated that, to date, he has not received a response to his request for engineering information concerning the cleaning process. Mr. Lubbers further objected to his supervisor's assertion that he did not want to clean engine parts because he did not want to get his hands dirty. Mr. Lubbers also reiterated that he stands by his disclosures and concerns about proper engine maintenance and disposal.

I have reviewed the original disclosure, the agency report, and Mr. Lubbers' comments. Based on that review, I have determined that the agency report contains all of the information required by statute, and that its findings appear to be reasonable.

As required by law, 5 U.S.C. § 1213(e)(3), I have sent a copy of the agency report and Mr. Lubbers' comments to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Armed Services and the House Armed Services Committee, and to the respective Committees' Ranking Member. I have also filed copies of the agency's redacted report and Mr. Lubbers' comments in our public file and closed the matter.

Respectfully,



William E. Reukauf  
Acting Special Counsel

Enclosures