



U. S. Department of Justice

Office of the Inspector General

November 27, 2007

Bruce P. Bernard, M.D., M.P.H.
Captain, USPHS
Chief Medical Officer
Health Hazard Evaluations and Technical Assistance
CDC/NIOSH
4676 Columbia Parkway R-10
Cincinnati, Ohio 45226

Re: Request for Technical Assistance

Dear Dr. Bernard:

I am writing to request that NIOSH's Health Hazard Evaluation Program provide technical assistance to the Office of the Inspector General at the United States Department of Justice (OIG), which is overseeing a health and safety investigation of Federal Prison Industries' (FPI) recycling of electronics equipment. FPI, otherwise known by its trade name UNICOR, is a wholly owned government corporation that is part of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP). The OIG is seeking NIOSH's assistance with the formulation and implementation of a medical study of UNICOR and BOP staff who likely were exposed to heavy metals and other hazardous materials while demanufacturing computers and breaking cathode ray tubes. We also are seeking help with an assessment of the BOP's medical surveillance program.

Approximately one year ago, the Federal Occupational Health Service (FOH) and NIOSH's Engineering and Physical Hazards Branch started field work at the request of the OIG at seven UNICOR recycling plants. This work has complemented efforts that OSHA and U.S. EPA also have undertaken at the request of the OIG concerning UNICOR's electronics recycling operations. Within the past month the FOH/NIOSH technical team completed an assessment of the lead and cadmium data that was collected from the first institution that the team visited (FCI Elkton) and have concluded that personal exposures of BOP and UNICOR workers to lead and cadmium likely have occurred. The data further revealed that the areas where UNICOR has conducted recycling at FCI Elkton are contaminated with lead and cadmium to a degree that warrants remedial action.

Personal exposures also may have occurred at UNICOR recycling plants besides the facility at Elkton. Interviews conducted by the OIG at other BOP institutions revealed that UNICOR staff worked in conditions that were similar in many respects to the conditions at Elkton. Industrial hygiene data collected by FOH and NIOSH at these institutions should be available in the near future. A concern that some UNICOR staff expressed to us during these site visits, in addition to concerns with their own health, was that they may have inadvertently exposed their families to heavy metals by wearing their dust-laden work clothes home.

We believe that the medical review should initially focus on three institutions that have or had glass-breaking operations: FCI Elkton, FCI Texarkana, and USP Atwater. For each institution approximately 15 UNICOR staff members and 100 inmates currently are involved in the recycling operations. I am attaching a "scope of work" document that we used when Dr. Singal was involved with the project that outlines our earlier plans for the medical review. Due to his untimely death we have not carried out the activities that it describes. We are amenable to revising our plans for the medical review in accordance with your advice.

As you are aware, I recently have spoken to Dr. Tepper about this project and met previously with Mr. Wallingford to discuss our field work. We anticipate that our recent findings concerning exposures at FCI Elkton will result in many questions about the health status of the workers and inmates who are or have been involved in UNICOR's electronics recycling program. We therefore are eager to initiate a medical review promptly with your assistance.

We appreciate your assistance with this matter. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 353-0332.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Randall Humm", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

S. Randall Humm
Investigative Counsel

Attachment