Hanford nuclear facility contractor ordered to pay
2 laid-off workers $186K in wages, damages for retaliation

SEATTLE – Computer Sciences Corp. improperly laid off two employees for raising nuclear safety concerns about the Hanford nuclear facility, in violation of federal whistleblower laws. The U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration has ordered the company to pay $186,000 in wages to the two employees.

The employees reported a defective electronic medical records system that had problems tracking medical restrictions. Consequently, workers medically restricted from certain jobs or areas with beryllium could be exposed. Beryllium, a metal once used at the facility, is known to cause lung damage.

"Those working around or for a nuclear facility must raise safety concerns freely without fear of retaliation from their bosses," said Ken Atha, acting OSHA regional administrator. "We will continue to protect the rights of whistleblowers, who raise concerns about violations that can sicken, injure or kill workers, harm the public or damage the environment."

Following facility inspection by the U. S. Department of Energy into the health and safety complaints the workers flagged, the employees were laid off. During an investigation into the workers' dismissal, the department found that CSC violated the Energy Reorganization Act by laying them off.

OSHA also ordered the contractor to post a notice for its workforce reinforcing that retaliation against employees for voicing nuclear safety concerns is illegal. Either party to the case can file an appeal with the department's Office of Administrative Law Judges.

The Hanford Site produced plutonium for nuclear weapons from the 1940s until 1987. Weapons production processes left solid and liquid waste that posed a risk to the local environment. The U.S. Department of Energy agreed to clean up the facility in 1989.

OSHA enforces the whistleblower provisions of the Energy Reorganization Act and 21 other statutes protecting employees who report violations of various airline, commercial motor carrier, consumer product, environmental, financial reform, food safety, health-care reform, nuclear, pipeline, worker safety, public transportation agency, maritime and securities laws. Employees who believe that they have been retaliated against for engaging in protected conduct may file a complaint with the secretary of labor to request an investigation by OSHA's Whistleblower Protection Program. Detailed information on employee whistleblower rights is available at http://www.whistleblowers.gov.

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Editor’s note: The U.S. Department of Labor does not release names of employees involved in whistleblower complaints.

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