

AFFIDAVIT

My name is Brian MacDonald. I am a former United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Consumer Safety Inspector. I am submitting this affidavit freely and voluntarily to Alyssa Doom, who has identified herself to me as an investigator for the Government Accountability Project. I am doing so without any threats, inducements or coercion. After two years of enduring health problems related to chemical exposure on the job, I feel it is time to speak out on behalf of other workers who have also suffered from exposure to dangerous chemicals while working in processing facilities.

I spent nearly nine years working for the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) before I had no choice but to leave my job due to my failing health. I began my work as a red meat inspector in Pennsylvania in 2002. I was later promoted to Inspector in Charge (IIC) at a facility in Monroe, New York. Finally, I was promoted to the Consumer Safety Inspector (CSI) position at Murray's Chicken in South Fallsburg, New York before leaving the USDA in 2011.

During my time with the USDA I was trained to have full knowledge of Agency regulations. I spent a great deal of time studying these rules. As a CSI, it was my responsibility to look for anything in the plant that could contribute to contamination of the product. I did salmonella tests and verified that the plant was properly completing E. coli tests. I made sure that water

temperatures were at the correct levels and looked for things like dripping water on a product. I even ensured that the bathrooms were cleaned. I excelled in my job because I understood my responsibilities and had good self-discipline as a result of years as an officer in the military. But after an incident that changed my life, I soon recognized an area where the duties assigned to the CSI were lacking: regulation of air quality. The combination of poor ventilation and the presence of a highly concentrated chemical in the plant – which could have been detected had I been given the tools necessary to monitor the facility's air – seriously damaged my health.

At Murray's Chicken, there are typically about 7000 chickens in the facility at all times. When they arrive they are taken out of their crates and brought through a wide door into the plant. The chickens urinate and defecate in this space, which has very little ventilation. The feces and urine produced by the birds emits heavy amounts of ammonia. Unlike the plant I had worked in previously, which had large ceiling fans, the air flow inside Murray's was almost nonexistent. The company counted on the wind from outside to blow in through the door and disperse the ammonia. However, on September 14th, 2011 the wind was only blowing about 2 miles per hour outside and I am quite sure, based on my sense of smell, that I was exposed to a heavily concentrated amount of ammonia vapor in this area. Immediately after detecting the very pungent odor of ammonia, I knew something was seriously wrong. The next morning I

got out of bed and began coughing up blood. I vomited after eating breakfast and had to call in sick to work. I know that this specific incident contributed significantly to my illness.

As a CSI, I had always been required to use my senses to detect any possible adulteration in food products. According to USDA regulations, if I detected a foul odor I was to locate the source of the smell and eliminate it. However, I was never trained to monitor air quality and I was never given any tools to gauge the presence of chemicals in the air. I had to rely on my sense of smell. Unlike the day I was exposed to heavy amounts of ammonia, it is not always a simple task to detect dangerous chemicals in the air. These chemicals can harm the product, the consumer, and those working in the facility. What is worse is that I found out breathing in high concentrations of ammonia can destroy a person's sense of smell. A CSI cannot fully complete his or her duties with no sense of smell. This poses food safety and worker health risks.

I know how important it is to ensure that chemicals are not harming the product. While I was working as an IIC, I wrote a plant up for painting the facility's walls during slaughter. I knew the fumes from the paint were releasing particles into the air that could permeate the product and contaminate the meat. If paint has the ability to damage the product, I can only imagine what the other dangerous chemicals used to process meat and poultry (i.e. peracetic acid or bleach) can do to it, especially in poorly ventilated areas.

Individually these chemicals are very dangerous. But it is also important to realize that when mixed together they have the potential to create toxic chemical combinations that are dangerous for inspectors and plant workers to breathe in. For example, by combining high amounts of ammonia (such as those in the areas where chickens are received) with the bleach used to clean other parts of the facility, one could create a combination that is deadly to breathe in. Concerns such as this are heightened when a facility has poor ventilation like Murray's.

In addition, I worry that hot temperatures in plants are probably contributing to health problems caused by chemicals. Murray's reached very high temperatures and the plant had no air conditioning. Vapor from chemicals travels even further with high heat and humidity. Moisture was always in the air at Murray's because workers constantly sprayed down the walls with water to clean them. I fear the combination of heat, moisture, chemicals, and bacteria created an environment that was conducive to health problems. This is why it is important to have good ventilation in processing plants. These problems would not exist if the company would improve ventilation.

Since the incident on September 14th, 2011, my entire lifestyle has changed. I have sustained injuries to my esophagus and my right lung. I have developed asthma and allergies that I did not have before being exposed to the ammonia. I have also been diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease. I used to go for runs,

sing, and play the bugle and trumpet in my community, but I can no longer do these activities. I cannot do any tasks that will cause me to breathe too heavily. As a result I have gained weight and must take blood pressure medication. I also have severe upper back pain and have to take two anti-inflammatory medicines, Tylenol and Gabapentin. I use two inhalers each day to make sure my lungs function properly. I cough frequently because of the scathing on my esophagus, and I can no longer enjoy some of the foods I used to eat because they cause esophageal pain. I have terrible coughing fits and I have to explain to those around me that I do not have a disease, and that the coughing is the result of an injury I sustained after being exposed to ammonia. It is also hard for me to talk for long periods of time without developing a coughing fit. Every time I inhale, it feels like sandpaper is rubbing against my throat. I live my life in constant pain and am forced to make regular visits to the doctor due to my condition.

Because of the situation with my health, I had to quit working in the plant. I am now collecting social security disability and am fighting for workman's compensation from the US Department of Labor. I have also filed a lawsuit against the plant.

After almost two years of pain, I am finally ready to speak out about my experiences. Recently, the Washington Post came out with an article about the dangers of chemicals in poultry processing. The article included a story about José Navarro, a poultry inspector who I worked side-by-side with for two years at

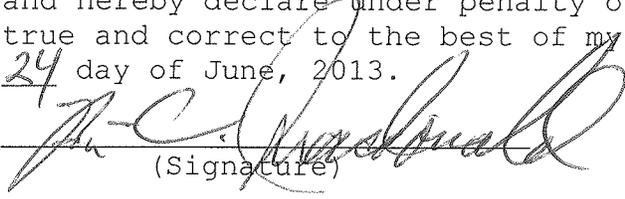
Murray's and whose death was most likely caused by exposure to the chemicals. José was with me on the day I experienced the incident with ammonia. He was a smoker and had asthma and an autoimmune disease prior to being exposed. I think that these factors caused him to be more severely impacted than me. He became very ill the morning after he was exposed. According to his wife, he was coughing up blood.

I am sure that the plant employees are affected by the chemicals just as much as the inspectors, but they do not say anything about the problem. I think this is because the plant will find a way to get rid of them if they complain. I also think that communication barriers may play a role in their silence.

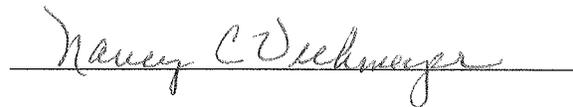
More than anything, if plants had decent airflow and kept moisture in the air low, there would probably not be an issue with ammonia or the use of other chemicals as long as they were diluted to appropriate levels. Poor ventilation in the Murray plant has caused additional safety problems. A while back, there was a fire inside the plant and smoke was everywhere. The inspectors walked off the line and headed to our offices, but in the short distance to the office we nearly choked to death. There were not even fire alarms in the building at this time! When I was working in the plant, my supervisors did nothing to solve the ventilation problem. In my opinion, the USDA does have a lot of power, but when push comes to shove the plant will always win.

The management at Murray's Chicken was never interested in investing in better systems for things like ventilation and sanitation. I remember someone saying that the plant would not fix its problems until someone died, which has now happened. It is time for plants to improve their systems to create an environment that is safe for everyone working in the plant.

I, Brian MacDonald, have reviewed this statement of 7 pages and hereby declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. Dated this 24 day of June, 2013.


(Signature)

Sworn and subscribed before me this 24 day of June, 2013.


(Notary Signature)

NANCY C. VIEHMEYER
NOTARY PUBLIC OF NEW JERSEY
My Commission Expires 8/7/2014