

AFFIDAVIT

My name is [REDACTED]. I am a retired United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) red meat and poultry 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. I authorize the publication of this statement contingent upon the redaction of my name, and the name and specific location of the establishments to which I refer. This statement relates to my concern over the use of harmful chemicals in USDA-inspected red meat and poultry processing establishments.

Before retiring, I worked as an inspector for the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) for approximately 17 years. I was stationed in a beef and poultry processing plant, [REDACTED]. During my time as an inspector, I received numerous cash awards and other awards for my quality work. Because I had so much experience working in various plants I also provided training to new employees. In my years as an inspector I gained the knowledge to recognize that the health problems experienced by those of us working in the plant are, without a doubt, related to the company's heavy use of chemicals in processing.

The conditions in the plant were tolerable until the company put in a new processing line in 1998 following the USDA's approval of HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point) as a processing model. HACCP is a program created to monitor the potential hazards throughout the flow of food production. Under HACCP, processing lines nearly doubled in speed. In fact, lines began moving so fast that inspectors could not possibly identify every carcass contaminated with fecal matter that came down the line. Instead of slowing down processing lines, the company started using the bird washer to douse carcasses with chemicals as a quick fix for fecal contamination and other pathogens that had the potential to harm consumers. Consequently, inspectors and company workers were exposed to a multitude of dangerous chemicals while on the job. The company did not care about our health. Management's only concern was getting the product through the line as quickly as possible.

I had many health problems as a result of exposure to chemicals used in processing, most of which are documented in the attached report from my doctor. I had trouble breathing, my lung capacity was low, and I developed allergies, which I had never had before in my life. I had trouble sleeping at night because I was constantly coughing and spitting up phlegm. I also had headaches and my eyes were irritated. I felt like the

chemicals affected my whole system. Others working in the plant had many of the same symptoms. Following our shifts we would come out of the plant with watering eyes and we could hardly breathe. It got to the point where I felt sick and terribly nervous just walking into the plant each day not knowing whether I would ever get better or if my health would only continue to decline.

After switching to HACCP we went through the same problems with chemicals day after day. I wrote about 75 noncompliance reports (NR) to the plant involving chemicals. These are forms that record areas where companies are not complying with their own written plans for operations. My fellow inspectors also wrote the company up for chemical problems. As a facility operating under FSIS inspection, the plant is obligated to provide an answer for how they will mitigate or eliminate the problems we introduce in NRs. Most of the time when the plant got an NR they ignored it. When they did respond, it was with a temporary fix that never really addressed the overarching problem. Our supervisor would accept their useless answers time and time again. After so many write-ups, they told us we could no longer write NRs for chemical problems and they put an end to it. The whole NR process seemed like a big game to me.

Sometimes OSHA (The Occupational Safety and Health Administration) came in to do some testing on the line. We

thought that the Administration might help identify some of the chemical problems in the plant. However, they only came during the early morning hours when chemical use was at its lowest. When I began to recognize this pattern, I asked them "Why do you always come in the morning when they aren't shoving the chemicals into the product". They responded that, "this is what's required". I suspect they were working together with the plant to cover up problems.

One night while I was working on the line, I noticed there was a major commotion coming from the corner of the evisceration room. I turned around to see what was going on and the manager of the chicken side of the plant was carrying two 5-gallon pails full of yellow, bubbling gunk. Whatever this substance was, it was very active. The stench almost knocked me off my feet. The manager went running out of the plant and later ended up in the emergency room. I found out afterward that the people working in the back of the plant were mixing the wrong kinds of chemicals together. Though I am not sure what the mixture contained, I assumed that it was going to be used on the product.

I am very concerned about the mixing of chemicals in plants. All of the cleaning chemicals and the chemicals designated for the product were kept together in the same area of the plant. According to the plant's regulations, everything was supposed to be marked. The problem is that chemical labels

are written in English, a language that most of those handling them cannot read. Additionally, the people handling chemicals are definitely not trained. I am worried that untrained employees may still be mixing together chemicals that are harmful to those working in the plants and also harmful to those consuming the product coming out of the plant. With the risk these chemicals pose to worker, consumer, and environmental health, I do not understand why the company never made an effort to train them.

When I could not endure my health problems any longer I went to my doctor who wrote up a long report discussing the affects the chemicals were having on me. The report is attached. Unfortunately, my doctor was unable to identify the specific chemicals causing my health problems, as I did not know which chemicals were being used where in the plant. We concluded that peracetic acid used to clean carcasses was probably the biggest contributor to my symptoms. I showed the letter to my supervisors and asked to be transferred out of the plant.

There are other plants that have the same problems with chemicals, which I know because I traveled to many other facilities throughout my career. One of these facilities had a particularly terrible problem with chemicals. During my time at this plant, I literally believed I was going to die. Shortly after entering the plant, I was physically unable to breathe. I

was taken out of the plant to get some fresh air. I called my supervisor and I was ordered to never return to this plant. To this day, I do not know if I was having an allergic reaction to the chemicals in this facility or if I was exposed to them in amounts so high that my body could not take it. After my experience here, I talked to another inspector who had worked in the plant and also thought he was going to die from exposure to chemicals.

My health became so bad that I could not handle walking into the plant anymore. I spent most of my time working in the poultry side of the plant, so when things became bad enough the FSIS gave me the option to transfer to the beef side of the plant full-time, where they used fewer chemicals. My fellow inspectors were upset about this. They felt it was unfair because they would have to spend more time inspecting poultry, which was a less desirable duty due to the heavy chemical use. I did not want to make the situation worse by getting others involved so I transferred out of the plant to another location.

I am very concerned with what the chemicals used to process meat and poultry are doing to consumers. We may not know the affects of these chemicals until it is too late. I cannot imagine that meat and poultry coming out of this plant is safe to eat because I know the chemicals are seeping into the carcasses. I think companies know what they need to do to

protect consumers but they also know they can get away with using the chemicals as an easy fix to kill harmful bacteria. They do not take precautions because their only concern is pushing the product through as quickly as possible.

I am also aware that many of the plant workers were experiencing health problems due to exposure to these chemicals. Many of these were the same problems I stated earlier. In addition, I personally know of at least five women who had miscarriages while working in the plant, and there may have been many more miscarriages by women working in other departments of the plant that I never found out about. While I was still at work, I tried to get some of these women to come forward too. Nearly all the people working in the plant were illegal immigrants. I think they were afraid they would lose their jobs or be deported for speaking up.

I wanted to get other inspectors involved in coming forward with their problems with the chemicals but nobody would. I think they either did not know what was causing their ailments or they were afraid that the USDA would retaliate against them for speaking out. The fear of retaliation is warranted, based on my knowledge about how USDA treats its inspectors.

Upon learning about the effects these chemicals have on those of us working in the plants, I hope that the FSIS, the

[REDACTED] company, and the chemical manufacturers will consider halting the use of substances that pose serious dangers to plant employees and government inspectors.

I, [REDACTED], have reviewed this statement of 8 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 \_\_\_ day of August, 2013.

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(Signature)

Sworn and subscribed before me this \_\_\_ day of July, 2013.

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(Notary Signature)



[REDACTED]

Letter

Medical Record # [REDACTED]  
EDITED  
July 9, 2008

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

RE: [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] 5  
Date of Birth: [REDACTED]

To Whom It May Concern:

[REDACTED] is a patient of [REDACTED] and a regular patient of mine who I have seen multiple times starting back in 2004 for illness related to [REDACTED] work environment. [REDACTED] works for the USDA as a meat and poultry inspector. [REDACTED] works at various plants, but most frequently at [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] typically presents to the clinic after having worked on the poultry side of the plant where [REDACTED] seems to be sensitive to chemicals used there and/or the environment in general. The patient never has symptoms while on the beef side and [REDACTED] does not have symptoms when at other plants. The patient's symptoms include burning, watery eyes, wheezing, coughing, burning sore throat, sneezing, runny nose, congestion, and, occasionally, shortness of breath. There have been several episodes where the patient has experienced nausea and vomiting. Symptoms resolve within hours, sometimes days, away from the poultry side of the plant. Symptoms occur only when exposed to poultry side of plant. [REDACTED] has tried taking an antihistamine and uses a respirator, neither of which made a whole lot of difference. The patient had a normal chest x-ray on May 1, 2008 and was referred for pulmonary function testing in May 2007.

The above condition greatly affects the patient's life and has caused [REDACTED] to miss a number of days of work. Due to relative frequency of symptoms and concern for the patient's overall health, I strongly recommend that [REDACTED] no longer work on the poultry side of the [REDACTED]. If you have any questions or concerns about the above information, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]