Whistleblower Suits Say Military Parts Defective

The Associated Press

SLIDELL, La. (AP) — A Slidell machining company has supplied defective parts for military vehicles, lawsuits by former employees claim.

The suits say Alliance Laser supplied welded parts to Textron Marine & Land Systems even though no employees were legally certified to weld the parts, The Times-Picayune reports (http://bit.ly/Xs9MdA).

The unit of Textron Inc. makes armored personnel carriers for the U.S. military.

Robert Vargas and Floyd Alan Williams are seeking damages under whistleblower laws, arguing they were fired for providing tips to federal investigators and speaking out against fraudulent practices.

The lawsuits were filed in U.S. District Court in New Orleans on Tuesday and Wednesday. Alliance has not yet filed a formal response in court. A woman who answered the phone at Alliance's office on Friday said the company had no comment.

A spokesman for Textron said Friday that the company can't comment on the lawsuit because "it does not directly involve Textron."

"Regarding our vehicles, we have thoroughly reviewed the parts and have found that they meet our standards," said Stephen Greene, Textron's vice president for communications. "These parts do not pose a safety risk to soldiers relying on our vehicles. The U.S. government recently verified their quality and our manufacturing process, and has since closed the matter."

In his lawsuit, Williams said he welded several parts later installed in Textron's M1117 trooper carrier vehicles -- blast windows, battery boxes, and grenade launchers, among other components. He claims no employee at Alliance Laser, including himself, was certified to weld those parts, as required by law.

Williams claims he told his supervisor, Jeremy Noller, that the techniques being used by the uncertified welders made all of Alliance's parts defective.

Alliance's quality control inspectors placed red tags on many defective parts, but company supervisors later removed those tags, allowing defective parts to be shipped to Textron, the lawsuit claims. Company officials then presented false records and made false statements to Textron that the parts had been approved by inspectors, the lawsuit claims.

"Upon information belief, U.S. soldiers have been injured due to Alliance's provision and concealment of defective M1117 parts," the lawsuit says.

According to the lawsuit, Noller told Williams that "if Williams' house was blown up, Williams' body would not be found, and Williams could not testify against Noller or Alliance." Williams was fired on Sept. 8, 2012.

Williams offered information to the FBI, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Attorney General "to assist their investigation into Alliance's violations of Louisiana and federal laws," the lawsuit says.

Vargas, a former quality control inspector, claims in his lawsuit that he was fired on April 18, 2012, for reporting defective welding work and refusing to approve parts that were ultimately sold to Textron. He claims that Alliance officials removed his red tags marking defects and covered up faulty cracks with filler, sandblasting and paint. Vargas also says he gave information to federal investigators.

Both men are seeking lost wages and damages for humiliation and mental anguish from receiving death threats.

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