Poor Supervision Cited At NY-Run Steam Plant

Michael Virtanen, Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Poor supervision at the steam plant serving the state government complex in Albany led to misbehavior by workers that included watching "Dancing With the Stars," being drunk on the job, and leaving bedrolls and beer cans in the facility, New York's inspector general reported Monday.

The Office of General Services disciplined seven workers and supervisors with fines ranging from $228 to $13,212, the report said. The intoxicated employee was subjected to two years of random drug and alcohol testing. Two others facing disciplinary charges retired last year.

"Only a few years after my office uncovered a significant dereliction of management responsibility leading to grossly improper behavior at OGS, blatant waste, abuse and potentially hazardous conduct continued," Inspector General Catherine Leahy Scott said. The agency has taken steps to fortify management, including bimonthly tours of every shift at its facilities statewide, with reports forwarded to her office, she said.

Problems identified in 2011 followed the inspector general's report two years earlier on two OGS workers, later convicted of fraud, who established in a state parking garage a hidden lounge with couches, a television and scales to weigh marijuana.

The Sheridan Avenue Steam Plant provides steam from natural gas boilers for heating and cooling the Empire State Plaza. Investigators say an engineer responsible for maintaining boilers exposed thousands of people to potential danger by working while intoxicated, and that two supervisors knew and did nothing.

According to their report, the 2010 plant manager acknowledged knowing about bedrolls and beer cans and did nothing about it. An unscheduled inspector general's tour in 2011 showed several rooms used for unauthorized breaks including cigarette butts and inappropriate photographs of women.

One employee, who has since retired, brought to work a television, a 15-foot antenna, a chair and a portable power generator to watch his favorite show, "Dancing with the Stars," during his shift in an enclosed parking deck after co-workers locked him out of another unauthorized break room that had a television, the report said.

Security cameras confirmed he watched an entire two-hour show on May 17, 2011. A supervisor, seen on the video walking past, told investigators he took no steps to discipline the employee because he wasn't his regular supervisor and past complaints hadn't gone anywhere.

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