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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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March 19, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As part of the Oversight Committee's ongoing oversight of Iraq contract management, I am writing to request documents relating to the Department of Defense's management of contracts for maintenance of electrical systems in facilities occupied by military and contractor personnel in Iraq. This issue was brought to my attention by Representative Jason Altmire, who requested that the Committee initiate an investigation into the death by accidental electrocution of Staff Sergeant Ryan D. Maseth, a Special Forces soldier from Pennsylvania.

According to the Army and Marine Corps, at least 12 service members have died in Iraq as a result of electrocution since 2003.¹ In fact, in October 2004, the Army issued a safety publication noting that five soldiers died from electrocution in 2004 alone and warning that improper grounding of electrical wires is "a factor in nearly every electrocution" and "a serious threat" for soldiers in Iraq.²

On January 2, 2008, Staff Sergeant Ryan Maseth was electrocuted while taking a shower in his living quarters in the Radwanayah Palace Complex in Baghdad. According to a memorandum issued by the Army Criminal Investigative Division, Staff Sergeant Maseth's death was due to improper grounding of the electric water pump which supplied water to the building's pipes. When Staff Sergeant Maseth stepped into the shower and turned on the water,

¹ E-mail from Sergeant Jennifer Evitts, Marine Liaison, U.S. Marine Corps, to Staff, Office of Rep. Jason Altmire (Feb. 15, 2008) (reporting two fatalities by electrocution classified as accidental); E-mail from Kelly Widener, Director, Strategic Communications, U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center, to Staff, Office of Rep. Jason Altmire (Feb. 14, 2008) (reporting ten fatalities by electrocution classified as accidental).

² *Electrocution: The Unexpected Killer*, Countermeasures (October 2004).

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an electrical short in the pump sent an electrical current through the water pipes to the metal shower hose, and then through Staff Sergeant Maseth's arm to his heart.³

The Committee has also been informed that the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) contracted with KBR Inc. in 2007 to perform maintenance of the building and that KBR may have submitted reports documenting safety hazards relating to the improper grounding of electrical devices. It remains unclear whether KBR was responsible for repairing these deficiencies.

Given the history of electrocutions in Iraq, I request that you provide copies of the following documents to the Committee in unredacted form:

- (1) All documents, including incident reports, investigative reports, forensic reports, psychological reports, witness statements, and correspondence, relating to the circumstances of Staff Sergeant Maseth's death;
- (2) All contracts, along with task orders, amendments, modifications, and revisions thereto, issued to KBR for the maintenance or repair of electrical systems at Camps Slayer and Victory;
- (3) All technical reports submitted by KBR to DCMA identifying electrical deficiencies, including the need for rewiring, in facilities maintained by KBR;
- (4) All reports and communications regarding improper electrical grounding in facilities in Iraq used by U.S. military or contractor personnel or maintained under contracts with the U.S. Government; and
- (5) The name, rank, current or last known address, and severity of injury for all U.S. military or contractor personnel injured or killed as a result of electrocution in facilities in Iraq maintained under contracts with the U.S. Government.

Please provide these documents by April 4, 2008.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee in the House of Representatives and has broad oversight jurisdiction as set forth in House Rule X. An attachment to this letter provides additional information on how to respond to the Committee's request.

³ Camp Slayer CID Office, U.S. Army, *Memorandum for Record: Response to Primary Next of Kin Questions 0004-08-CID259-52146* (Jan. 21, 2008).

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If you have any questions, please contact Theodore Chuang or Margaret Daum of the Committee staff at (202) 225-5420.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Henry A. Waxman in black ink.

Henry A. Waxman
Chairman

Enclosure

cc: Tom Davis
Ranking Minority Member