

PRESS CONFERENCE
U.S. Attorney Ed Kubo
United States v. David Williams
August 8, 2007

The United States Coast Guard is recognized as being the “Guardians of the Sea.” They are a very important branch of our military and a key partner in the Department of Homeland Security.

In their role of protecting our Nation’s waters, the U.S. Coast Guard is also responsible for investigating and enforcing the laws of the United States, when it comes to those who would pollute our oceans and harbors. And, they perform their duties professionally and without favor or bias.

This is the back-drop for today’s press conference. Today, I am announcing that a Federal Grand Jury has indicted Coast Guard Chief Warrant Officer, David G. Williams, Jr., for obstructing justice and giving false statements during a federal investigation.

The Coast Guard High Endurance Cutter RUSH is home ported in Honolulu Harbor. Although Honolulu is the base for the U.S. Coast Guard’s 14th District, commanded by Rear Admiral Sally Brice-O’Hara, the RUSH reports to its chain of command in Alameda, California.

Between December 2005 and March 2006, the RUSH was preparing and conducting engine maintenance and repairs for an intense military vessel training program.

During this time period, Chief Warrant Officer Williams was assigned to the RUSH’s Engineering Department, as the Main Propulsion Assistant. In this capacity, he was responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the main diesel engines and other machinery in the RUSH’s Engine Room.

Vessels normally generate quantities of oil-contaminated bilge waste, which is produced whenever water mixes with machine and lubricating oils dripping from engines and other operating equipment on these vessels. These waste products are collected and processed through a pollution prevention control device known as an “Oily Water Separator.” After the separation of the oil from the water, these materials may be safely, but properly, disposed of by the ship.

Because there was an excessive level of bilge waste that had collected on board the RUSH, which needed to be removed before other tasks could be done in preparing the vessel for its intensive training mission, on March 8, 2006, Chief Warrant Officer Williams directed and ordered that the bilge waste be disposed of directly into Honolulu Harbor — and by-passing the use of the Oily Water Separator.

It has been approximated that within 4-5 hours on that date, approximately 2,000 gallons of pollutants were dumped into the Harbor from the RUSH.

This direct overboard discharge of bilge, thereafter allowed the RUSH to meet its maintenance requirements in order to get underway in its intensive training mission on time.

Within a few days, however, investigators from the State of Hawaii Department of Health were notified of the possible discharge of pollutants into Honolulu Harbor.

Thereafter, the RUSH's Executive Officer, along with investigators from the Coast Guard Investigative Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency also launched their investigation into the incident.

In the course of their investigation, the Defendant Williams made repeated false oral statements and false type written statements to federal investigators, in which he denied involvement in the disposal of the pollutants into Honolulu Harbor.

Thus, the Defendant now stands charge in Federal Court for obstructing justice and providing false statements during an official investigation. If convicted of the Obstruction charge, the maximum sentence is 5 years imprisonment. Likewise, if convicted for providing False Statements, the Defendant can be sentenced to up to 5 years imprisonment.

As I indicated to you previously, the United States Coast Guard is an important part of not only our national defense, they are a key agency in the protection of our waters from those who would pollute our oceans and harbors.

Of course, this case is a shining example that they will hold themselves to the same standard of care for our waters, that they would hold others. Their investigation of this case, along with the investigators from EPA was done professionally and I want to thank both agencies for their work on this case. Thank you Admiral, and thank you Special Agent Kahakui.

I would also like to thank State Attorney General Mark Bennett and the State of Hawaii Department of Health for holding off on their investigation (at our request) when this federal investigation was launched.

In closing, I want to stress that this investigation is by no means a reflection on those dedicated men and women of the United States Coast Guard. They serve our country to the best of their abilities everyday, and they serve with honor.

Thank you.