

memorandum

DATE: May 22, 2009

REPLY TO

ATTN OF: IG-40

SUBJECT: Letter Report on "Security Weaknesses in the Handling of Unclassified Printers and Copiers at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory," (INS-L-09-06, S08IS001)

TO: Manager, Oak Ridge Office

This is to advise you of the results of an Office of Inspector General inspection concerning an allegation that the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) was excessing printers used to process sensitive, unclassified information without purging or destroying their information storage devices. As we conducted our inspection, we coordinated closely with site officials, and numerous corrective actions were taken or initiated to address our findings. This report serves to document the final results of the review.

BACKGROUND

ORNL's primary mission is to provide technology and expertise to Government agencies in support of national security. Much of the information produced or received by ORNL is sensitive and requires special handling to protect against unauthorized disclosure. The Department's Oak Ridge Office oversees the management of ORNL by UT-Battelle, LLC.

In carrying out its mission, ORNL uses various information technology systems to process or reproduce information, including some printers and copiers containing hard drives capable of storing information. This information may include sensitive, unclassified information, such as official use only, export controlled, and personally identifiable information (e.g., name, social security number and medical history) and requires specific protection as mandated by law, regulation, or policy. Department policy requires that information storage devices in printers and copiers used to process such information must be cleared, purged, or destroyed by approved overwriting software, degaussing, or physical destruction before being excessed, returned to vendors, or internally transferred, so such information is not released to unauthorized personnel.

The Office of Inspector General received an allegation that ORNL was excessing printers used to process sensitive, unclassified information without purging or destroying their information storage devices. Previous work by our office at other Department sites has identified problems with memory devices not being cleared, purged, or destroyed prior to excessing. We initiated an inspection to evaluate ORNL's procedures for excessing printers with hard drive storage capability. Based on the results of our preliminary work, we broadened the scope of our inspection to include copiers.

RESULTS OF INSPECTION

We concluded that ORNL did not have adequate procedures for excessing printers and returning or transferring copiers to prevent the unauthorized dissemination of sensitive, unclassified information. We found that during our sample period of April 2006 through April 2008 up to 30 printers were excessed from ORNL without their hard drives being cleared, purged, or destroyed. We interviewed two of the associated property custodians, and they confirmed that their printers were used to process sensitive information.

We also found that during a sample period of 2006 until December 2007, ORNL returned 9 copiers to its suppliers and internally transferred 16 copiers for reuse without ensuring that the copiers' hard drives were cleared, purged, or destroyed. ORNL discontinued those practices when we first raised this matter in December 2007. ORNL subsequently confirmed seven of the nine returned copiers definitely processed sensitive information. We were told by ORNL's two copier suppliers that they were unaware of the whereabouts of the returned copiers' hard drives. The supplier responsible for six of the seven copiers informed us that it uses facilities located in Mexico to refurbish returned copier components.

The requirement to clear, purge, or destroy information storage devices used to process sensitive information has been Department policy for several years. We noted, however, that ORNL's implementation procedures did not specifically identify that printers and copiers may have information storage devices, which may have contributed to ORNL's failure to examine such equipment for the presence of a hard drive prior to excessing or internal transfer. Several individuals we interviewed told us that they were unaware that printers and copiers may have such devices and were, as a result, subject to special handling prior to excessing or internal transfer.

Also, although outside the scope of our inspection, while reviewing the hard drives of several printers awaiting excessing, the Office of Inspector General's Technology Crimes Section discovered that one printer was used to print material from multiple pornographic websites. In addition to clear prohibitions against such use, accessing inappropriate websites has a high probability of introducing malicious code designed to infiltrate and damage, modify, or monitor a computer system without the owner's knowledge or consent. The property custodians for the examined printers told us it could not be determined who used the printer to print the pornography.

In response to our review, ORNL officials: initiated a management assessment; disabled the document servers for over 160 copiers with hard drives in use at ORNL to prevent the release of sensitive information stored on the hard drives; modified copier lease agreements to include a requirement to either remove copier hard drives or to properly clear, purge, or destroy the hard drives before excessing; and, updated local procedures to incorporate the examination of excess printers and copiers to identify hard drives for proper disposition. ORNL discontinued returning copiers to its suppliers after we made initial inquiries in December 2007 and later identified 218 hard drives to be removed from leased copiers. ORNL is taking actions to have the hard drives purged or destroyed in the near future.

Since corrective actions have been taken, we are not making any formal recommendations in this report and a formal response is not required. This inspection was conducted in accordance with the “Quality Standards for Inspections” issued by the President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency. We appreciate the responsiveness of your office and the cooperation we received throughout this inspection. If you have any questions concerning this review, please contact Ms. Marilyn Richardson or me at (202) 586-4109.



Elise M. Ennis
Assistant Inspector General
for Inspections

cc: Director, Office of Science
Chief Health, Safety and Security Officer
Director, Office of Internal Review (CF-1.2)
Audit Liaison, Oak Ridge Office