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# NRC NEWS

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## **NRC SETTLES DISCRIMINATION CASE; GEORGIA CO. AGREES TO STRENGTHEN SAFETY CONSCIOUS WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Williams Industrial Services Group, LLC, of Stone Mountain, Ga., has agreed to implement industry-standard programs to promote a safety-conscious work environment as part of a settlement with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of a discrimination complaint and charges of deliberately providing false information to federal investigators.

The settlement, achieved through the NRC's alternative dispute resolution program, stems from a 2000 incident involving three painters employed by Williams at the Perry Nuclear Power Plant, in Perry, Ohio, where Williams was performing contract work for plant operator FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Co. Two of the painters were laid off and a third was forced to resign after they expressed safety concerns to FirstEnergy officials about directions they received from their supervisor for painting in the plant's Fuel Handling Building.

"The NRC places prime importance on promoting a safety-conscious work environment among its licensees and their contractors," said Michael Johnson, director of NRC's Office of Enforcement. "We will not tolerate discrimination against employees who raise safety concerns or providing false information to our investigators."

Under the settlement, Williams agrees to take a number of corrective actions, including comparing its safety conscious work environment program with industry "best practices" to ensure that the company's program incorporates industry trends and developments; conducting periodic audits of its program to ensure its effectiveness; and modifying its company ethics policy to include an explicit reference to the necessity for complete and candid communications with government agencies. The corrective actions in the settlement have been confirmed by an order issued to Williams.

NRC agrees to withdraw its deliberate misconduct citation against Williams, issued Feb. 24, 2005. The employee protection violation, originally issued as a Severity Level III (the second lowest in a scale of IV, signifying an escalated enforcement sanction viewed as a significant regulatory concern) will be treated instead as a violation without severity level specified. The NRC will evaluate the implementation of Williams' commitments related to employee protection and deliberate misconduct during future inspections.

As part of the investigation of this complaint, the supervisor involved has been barred from NRC-licensed activities for three years for deliberately providing false information during the NRC's investigation. The supervisor pleaded guilty in July 2004 to a felony charge of providing false information to the NRC.

Also, FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Co. was fined \$55,000 for violating employee protection requirements. The company admitted to the violation, and it has paid the fine.

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