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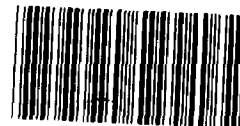
UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

PROCUREMENT, LOGISTICS,
AND READINESS DIVISION

B-202796

MAY 4, 1981

The Honorable John F. Lehman, Jr.
The Secretary of the Navy



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Dear Mr. Secretary:

Subject: Change Needed in Procedures for Administering Retention of Knowledge Tests in Radiological Control (PLRD-81-23)

We have investigated a Puget Sound Naval Shipyard employee's allegations concerning procedures for administering retention of knowledge tests in radiological control. We talked to the employee, Shipyard command and training officials, and officials of the Nuclear Propulsion Directorate, Naval Sea Systems Command, Department of the Navy. We also reviewed Navy regulations on radiological testing and Shipyard records on tests during 1980.

In investigating the allegations, we found a potential problem in administering the retention of knowledge testing program. Because employees have advance notice of the test, they can study for it and, if they are not available, substitutes can take it. Therefore, the test does not meet the objective of testing how much knowledge is being retained.

RETENTION OF KNOWLEDGE TEST

To maintain retention of knowledge and ability between reverification periods, the Navy requires 1/ that personnel be randomly and periodically selected for retention of knowledge tests. On the basis of the results of these tests, shipyards determine if more frequent training is necessary.

Failing a retention test is the equivalent of failing a reverification examination. An employee who fails this test would have to take a 6-hour training course and pass a reverification examination.

1/NAVSHIPS Instruction Manual 389-0288, article 106.3.C.

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At the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, when employees are unable to take the retention of knowledge test, their shops are allowed to provide substitutes. However, according to Shipyard officials, this has not been a problem because there were only 3 substitutions in 226 selections during a 10-month period of testing in 1980.

INVESTIGATION OF ALLEGATIONS

The Shipyard employee alleged that before taking the test he was given a copy of the test to study and that, although he was unable to take the test, he was told he passed anyway. We found the following concerning these allegations.

Until about a year ago, the Shipyard gave employees copies of completed official examinations to study. However, the Shipyard has discontinued the practice and, while it is possible that copies are still available, none have been provided in the last year. Employees do have access to other training information during their normal work hours.

The date of the employee's test in question was February 15, 1980, and we could find no evidence that completed tests have been given employees since then. Therefore, while the employee's allegation may have been true, the Shipyard has recognized and corrected the problem.

The employee also alleged that he was told he passed the test even though he was unable to take it. Shipyard records show the employee was on leave when the test was given and he did not take or pass the test. Instead, the records indicate that a substitute took the test and failed. Without evidence to refute Shipyard records, we conclude that this allegation has no merit.

PERSONNEL SHOULD NOT BE PERMITTED TO STUDY BEFORE THE TEST

The Navy's objective for the retention of knowledge test--to identify areas where employees need more frequent training in radiological control--is not being met because employees receive advance notice of the test and can study for it.

Employees are selected randomly, but are notified about the test the day before. Advance notice allows the employees time to study and, as discussed earlier, until a year ago they were even provided copies of prior examinations. In instances where the employees are unable to take the test, their shops are allowed to substitute other employees.

Shipyard officials said that the advance notice is needed because it is impractical to notify employees in an industrial environment on the day of the test. Because employees are spread among many work sites and because of the nature of a project, workers may be unable to leave to take the test.

While we recognize the potential problems of providing no advance notice, we feel it is necessary to measure retention and to respond to the Navy's objective for the test. As it is now, the advance notice and substitution procedures appear aimed at assuring that a high percentage of employees are tested and that a high percentage of employees pass. For example, 85 to 95 percent of employees passed the test. However, one instructor told us that many employees would fail without studying.

CONCLUSIONS

Our examination disclosed that the retention of knowledge testing procedures should be changed. We are concerned that the current procedures of advance notice, which result in high percentages of employees who are tested and who pass, may not be a true measure of employees' capabilities. In emergency situations insufficient knowledge about radiological control could be serious. We discussed this with the Director, Nuclear Technological Division, Naval Sea Systems Command. He said the retention of knowledge testing was only part of a larger testing program. He also agreed with Shipyard officials that not providing advance notice would make it difficult for employees to take the test without adversely affecting work schedules.

While retention of knowledge testing is only part of the Navy's total testing program, it appears to be important; otherwise, failure would not carry a penalty of loss of verification. Although not providing advance notice of the test may result in fewer employees being available to take the test, the results would be more conclusive of knowledge being retained. In our opinion, this is needed to meet the stated objective of the retention of knowledge tests--to identify areas where more frequent training is needed.

If testing without notice is implemented and still results in a high percentage of employees passing, then it would seem warranted to resume notice to avoid the administrative problems of an industrial environment.

RECOMMENDATION


We recommend that you test, possibly at one shipyard, eliminating advance notice prior to retention of knowledge testing. If this results in more accurate test results, it should be implemented Navy-wide.

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As you know, section 236 of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970 requires the head of a Federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

We are sending copies of this report to the Director, Office of Management and Budget, and to the Chairmen of the appropriate congressional committees.

Sincerely yours,


Donald J. Horan
Director