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OPINION // OPEN FORUM

## Open Forum: Hunters Point Shipyard whistle-blowers are misleading the public

By Charlie MacPherson Feb. 27, 2019

There are three facts about the cleanup of Hunters Point Shipyard that have gotten inadequate attention or media coverage, but are vital to understand the situation:

- The so-called radiological safety issues being raised now were identified in 2012 as part of a quality-control process and investigated and corrected by Tetra Tech EC with direct oversight from the Navy and environmental regulators.
- The safety claims all stem from a handful of so-called whistle-blowers with financial motives to make misleading allegations and create fear.
- The whistle-blowers all worked for New World Environmental, a small engineering firm that the Navy required Tetra Tech EC to use.

Donald Wadsworth, the president of New World Environmental, is the man responsible for hiring all of the individuals implicated in soil swapping at Hunters Point, including the two former Tetra Tech EC employees who pleaded guilty. Wadsworth has now labeled himself a whistle-blower and sued Tetra Tech EC along with the others.

When working at Hunters Point, the whistle-blowers did not raise safety issues to Tetra Tech EC, question radiological testing or go to the U.S. Department of Justice, or the media about the safety issues they now allege.

While the media has portrayed the whistle-blowers as ex-employees worried about safety, the facts are different.

These former New World Environmental workers are attempting to extract millions of dollars through their lawsuits. They are relying on laws that are supposed to motivate people to do the right thing — not to participate in the wrongdoing, fail to report it at the time, and then come forward half a decade later in hopes of generating a significant payday. Their fear-mongering has created such confusion and fear that the Justice Department has joined a part of their lawsuit.

Tetra Tech EC will prevail as the facts presented in court show that its work met Navy standards. In fact, on Feb. 5, the California Department of Public Health released the results of its study of Parcel A-1 and found no health or safety risks to the community.

The whistle-blowers' claims stem from 2012 when the Navy identified soil-sampling data at one location that did not appear representative of the sampling area. At that time, Tetra Tech EC immediately conducted a full investigation, analyzed sample results, identified areas for resampling, and conducted additional remediation where necessary. Tetra Tech EC removed subcontractors from the shipyard, disciplined employees and implemented other corrective actions.

Tetra Tech EC fully documented that investigation and completed corrective actions with comprehensive review by and coordination with the Navy and regulators. The Navy also conducted its independent review and released its conclusion in 2014, finding that "The Navy's contractor (Tetra Tech EC) corrected identified deficient conditions and incorporated additional QC steps to avoid recurrence."

Unfortunately, when anti-development activists — who have opposed redevelopment at Hunters Point since long before Tetra Tech EC ever set foot there — joined forces with the whistle-blowers, the Navy did not stand up to the resulting political pressure.

A personal injury attorney, David Anton, grabbed hold of anti-development sentiment and fear, and has been able to stall much-needed housing in San Francisco.

His claims against Tetra Tech EC filed on behalf of the whistle-blowers at Hunters Point are baseless and were manufactured using information from Tetra Tech EC and the Navy's own investigations in 2012 to 2014, as well as investigations by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 2014 and 2015, which documented that some issues were identified and corrected during this time. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission investigation found no evidence of any involvement by Tetra Tech EC management. The U.S. Justice Department's extensive criminal investigation has resulted in the prosecution of only the two former employees who pleaded guilty to their crimes.

Amid all the confusion, few have paid attention to the background and motivations of the whistle-blowers, their attorney, and the anti-development activists who are taking advantage of their charade. For them, it is all about the money.

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