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Requested to Falsify Data

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Description

Stephanie Simon knew Environmental Manager Adam Baines would not be pleased with her report on the chemical spill. The data clearly indicated that the spill was large enough that regulations required it to be reported to the state. Adam Baines asks Stephanie to change her report.

Abstract

This case is one of thirty-two cases which address a wide range of ethical issues that can arise in engineering practice provided by the Center For the Study of Ethics in Society, Western Michigan University.

Body

I

Stephanie Simon knew Environmental Manager Adam Baines would not be pleased with her report on the chemical spill. The data clearly indicated that the spill was large enough that regulations required it to be reported to the state. Stephanie

perceived Adam to be someone who thinks industry is over-regulated, especially in the environmental area. At the same time, he prided himself as a major player in maintaining XYZ's public reputation as an environmental leader in the chemical industry. "We do a terrific job," he often said. "And we don't need a bunch of hard to read, difficult to interpret, easily misunderstood state regulations to do it. We got along just fine before the regulators ran wild, and we're doing fine now."

When Stephanie presented her report to Adam, he lost his temper. "This is ridiculous! We're not going to send anything like this to the state. A few gallons over the limit isn't worth the time it's going to take to fill out those damned forms. I can't believe you'd submit a report like this. Stephanie, go back to your desk and rework those numbers until it comes out right. I don't want to see any more garbage like this."

What should Stephanie do?



Stephanie refused to rework the report. Instead she went back to her desk, signed the report, wrote a memo about her conversation with Adam, and then returned to Adam's office. She handed him the report and said, "You don't want to see any more garbage like this? Neither do I. Here's my original report--signed, sealed, and delivered. I've had it here. I'm not fudging data for anyone." As she turned to leave, she added, "By the way, Adam, before you get any ideas about making it hard for me to get another job, I have a nice little memo about our earlier conversation. I won't hesitate to send it right upstairs at the slightest provocation."

Discuss Stephanie's way of handling this problem.



Bruce Bennett was pleased to have the job vacated by Stephanie Simon. It was an advancement in both responsibility and pay. He knew about the circumstances of Stephanie's angry departure. All went well for the first several months. Then there was another spill. Bruce's preliminary calculations indicated that the spill exceeded the specified limit requiring a report to the state. He also knew how Adam would

react to the "bad news".

Bruce had worked hard to get his present position, and he looked forward to "moving up the ladder" at XYZ. He certainly did not want to go job hunting at this time in his career. He thought, "These numbers are so close to falling below the limit that a little 'rounding off' here or there might save us all a lot of grief."

What should Bruce do?

IV

Imagine how the above situations would be evaluated from the following perspectives:

1. A member of the state's environmental protection agency.
2. The CEO of XYZ.
3. Attorneys at XYZ who handle environmental affairs.
4. Other industries faced with similar environmental problems.
5. Members of the community whose health may be adversely affected if XYZ and other industries do not responsibly handle environmental problems. To what extent do you think Stephanie, Bruce, and Adam should take into consideration these perspectives in determining what their responsibilities are?

Notes

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Prepared with James Jaksa.

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