



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

US Parts

Author(s)

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Description

John Budinski, quality control engineer at Clarke Engineering, has a problem. Clarke contracted with USAWAY to supply a product subject to the requirement that all parts are made in the United States. Although the original design clearly specifies that all parts must satisfy this requirement, one of Clarke's suppliers failed to note that one of the components has two special bolts that are made only in another country. There is not time to design a new bolt if the terms of the contract are to be met.

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

John Budinski, quality control engineer at Clarke Engineering, has a problem. Clarke contracted with USAWAY to supply a product subject to the requirement that all parts are made in the United States. Although the original design clearly specifies that all parts must satisfy this requirement, one of Clarke's suppliers failed to note that one of the components has two special bolts that are made only in another country. There is not time to design a new bolt if the terms of the contract are to be met. USAWAY is a major customer, and not meeting the deadline can be expected to have unfortunate consequences for Clarke.

John realizes that the chances of USAWAY discovering the problem on their own is slim. The bolts in question are not visible on the surface of the product. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that those who work on repairs will notice that the bolts are foreign made. In any case, Clarke is under contract to do the repairs. Meanwhile, it can work on a bolt design so that it will be ready with USA bolts when, and if, replacements are needed.

What should John do?

1. Keep quiet and allow the product to go out as is.
2. Discuss the problem with his superiors.
3. Other.



[Following I. 1.]

John lets the product go to USAWAY with the foreign bolt. Some months later a recently dismissed Clarke employee is at a party. After several drinks, several people begin telling "war stories" about business. The former Clarke employee tells the story of how Clarke once faced a tough situation -- conceal the fact that a pair of bolts were foreign made or give up a multi-million dollar contract. Although USAWAY was not named, a USAWAY stockholder is present and contacts USAWAY officials to check out its contracts with Clarke. Prior to examining the products Clarke has supplied, USAWAY confronts Clarke. What should Clarke representatives do?



[Following I. 2.]

John informs his immediate superior of the problem. He is told simply to let the product go out as is. What should he do? [Suppose he does as he is told and then the former employee tells the story in II.]

Notes

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