



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Knowledge of Damaging Information (adapted from NSPE Case No. 76-4)

Year

1999

Description

An engineer has a conflict between honoring an agreement with a former employer and reporting a hazard to protect the public interest. This is an open-ended scenario for discussion based on a case from the NSPE Board of Ethical Review.

Body

The State Pollution Control Authority advises the Bright Corporation that it has 60 days to apply for a permit to discharge manufacturing wastes into a body of water.

In order to convince the Authority that it will meet the environmental standards, the Bright Corporation employs Persaud, an engineer, to perform consulting engineering services and submit a detailed report. After completing the studies, Persaud concludes that the discharge from the plant will violate environmental standards and that the corrective action will be very costly to Bright. Persaud verbally notifies the company, which terminates its contract with Persaud with full payment for the services performed. It instructs Persaud not to render a written report to the corporation.

A short time later, Persaud learns that the Authority has called a public hearing, where the Bright Corporation will present data to support its claim that the present plant discharge meets minimum standards.

What, if anything, should Persaud do now? Is Persaud obliged to report the violation of environmental standards to the Authority? Does Persaud have any residual obligation to the Bright Corporation that would stand in the way of doing so?

[NSPE Code of Ethics](#) An earlier version may have been used in this case.

Notes

See the original NSPE case at: [Knowledge of Information Damaging to Client's Interest - Case No. 76-4.](#)

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