



Online Ethics Center  
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

# Inez Austin - The Threats and Harassment: Abuse of Complainants

## Author(s)

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## Description

An outline of the harassment of Inez Austin.

## Body

Inez Austin never realized that her refusal to consent to the pumping procedure would result in the termination of her job as well as severe harassment. When Austin consistently refused to sign the document, Richard Kimura, her boss, threatened Austin with disciplinary action, claiming that Austin's work was causing inefficiency and low productivity. With the July 1 deadline made in the [Tri-party Agreement](#), a thirty-year cleanup program reconciled by the DOE and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Kimura felt immediate pressure to begin pumping tanks. If cleanup deadlines were not met, the state could take the federal government to court. Austin's refusal to sign this document resulted in a temporary delay of the pumping process.

Consequently, Austin's refusal to sign triggered several events that led to unfair treatment and harassment. For example, that year, she was given the lowest employee ratings she ever received in all eleven years at Westinghouse. Not only that, remarks were made about the state of her mental health that implied a need to see a psychiatrist. At work, she was moved from her office into a dirty trailer and was not given much work. She did not receive mail for eight weeks.

On July 1, 1991, the Energy Department's inspector general found that security personnel at Westinghouse Hanford illegally acquired and used equipment, to wiretap, eavesdrop and violate regulations and Federal law ([NY Times, 8/1/91](#)). Much of this illegal surveillance was directed towards Austin. Austin also indicated other actions of harassment including a house break-in.

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## **Resource Type**

Case Study / Scenario