U.S. Department of Labor

Office of Inspector General
Washington, D.C. 20210

JUL - 7 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: ESTHER JOHNSON
Job Corps Administrator

FROM: ELLIOT P. LEWIS
Assistant Inspector General
for Audit

SUBJECT: **ALERT REPORT:** National Park Service Has Not Assured the Safety and Health of Students and Staff at the Oconaluftee Job Corps Center
Report Number: 26-06-001-01-370

This memorandum transmits the results of specific safety and health issues found during our performance audit of the Oconaluftee Job Corps Center (OJCC) located in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and recommends immediate corrective actions. The results included in this interim report are based on our work to date. Fieldwork is continuing and we will provide overall audit results when our work is completed.

We found three conditions that we believe pose safety and health risks to the students and staff at the center: (1) fire detection and alarm systems are not operable in every building; (2) food handling and storage areas in the dining hall have deteriorated due to long-term roof damage; and (3) the National Park Service (NPS) ranger firing range is located too close to the OJCC student and staff population.

We recommend you take immediate action to ensure conditions on center property are corrected and work with the NPS to determine if the firing range needs to be relocated.

Background:

The Department of Labor Office Inspector General was requested to perform a financial audit of NPS operated Job Corps centers. OJCC, located in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park near Cherokee, North Carolina, one of the three centers operated by NPS, was chosen for our first audit. DOL provides funding to NPS to operate Job Corps centers, including funding for facility maintenance, through annual appropriation transfers. Included in the 1989 Interagency Agreement between NPS and DOL, the Park Service agreed to comply with Job Corps rules, regulations and guidelines. Job Corps

has provided minimum policies and procedures to be used to operate Job Corps centers through a Policies and Requirements Handbook (PRH). The PRH requires center operators to take corrective action in cases involving imminent danger, defects in fire prevention and protection, and unsanitary conditions.

Results:

As a result of our analysis of recent and past reports issued on center conditions, interviews with the center's safety officer and the center director and onsite observations, we determined the following:

- **Fire detection and alarm systems are not and have not been fully operational and/or in place in a number of center buildings as discussed below:**

  1. During a May 25, 2006, fire drill, the center safety officer found fire alarms in the gymnasium and education building out of order, the residential living area in need of an alarm system, the alarm for the carpentry building inoperable, and the system in the facility maintenance building registering in trouble code.
  2. On May 31, 2006, Link Technologies (Link), a contractor to DOL Job Corps, reported fire detection/alarm systems for the education building, gymnasium, carpentry shop, maintenance shop, and residential living area without functioning fire detection and alarm systems. The contractor identified the condition as a repeat life safety code issue with potentially catastrophic effects.
  3. In a June 12, 2006, report by a public health consultant from NPS, the same condition was identified. This report added that the areas are accessible and utilized by nearly all students on a daily basis.
  4. In addition, during a June 14, 2006, fire inspection by the center safety officer, the smoke detection system in one dorm room was found to be inoperable. The center safety officer stated that over the last several years he informed the center, regional, and National Park Service headquarters management personnel of these conditions.
  5. The fire detection/alarm system problems were identified in Facility Planning Reports in 2002 and 2004.

- **Unsanitary conditions are present in the center dining hall as discussed below:**

  1. In the May 31, 2006, report by Link, concerns for student safety because of conditions in the dining hall resulting from leaks in the roof were discussed
  2. Link reported that "the most noteworthy result of the water leaks is the potential of food contamination."
  3. Link's report also noted that water had leaked into the deep fryer/steam cooker in the food preparation area of the kitchen.
  4. The presence of mold and potentially harmful bacteria growth was included in the report as a concern to the students' and staff health.

5. In a report by a NPS public health consultant, the same conditions as described in Link's report were discussed. The consultant stated that if the conditions become worse the cafeteria might have to be closed due to public health and safety issues.
6. In the Facility Planning Report of 2002, it was noted that the center had been provided funding in 1994 to replace the roof. The report further stated that only one-third of the roof had been completed and explained that the center indicated that funding was not sufficient to complete the entire roof.
7. The current center safety officer stated that he believes the continued neglect of the condition of the dining hall could lead to mold getting into the students' food that could result in young people becoming ill.
8. Through personal observation, we witnessed deteriorated conditions throughout the dining hall, such as exhaust fans partially out of the ceilings, water stains in light fixtures, a crack in the ceiling of the food freezer and rust along the freezer ceiling, and walls flaking in a number of areas in the food preparation area, student dining area, and restroom areas.

- **We also noted a potential safety issue due to the location of the Park Rangers' firing range**. The auditors were present at the center during a week of law enforcement certifications at the firing range and observed as many as 20 to 30 officers firing a variety of weapons at the range. The concern for student and staff safety stems from the fact the range is no more than three-quarters of a mile from the populated part of the center. It was also noted that the range is readily accessible by foot, and the only barrier observed was a gate across the access road. In addition, the range is designed in such a way that those firing at targets are shooting parallel to the center. Although the range is surrounded by trees, it is possible that a bullet could accidentally be fired toward the center. In an interview with one of the Park Rangers, we were told that personnel throughout the park are notified when the range is in use; however, he noted that they have not been notifying Job Corps center management.

Recommendations:

We recommend the Job Corps Administrator:

1. Direct the National Park Service to correct all fire detection and alarm system deficiencies at the Oconaluftee Job Corps center within 30 days.
2. Instruct the National Park Service to begin repair to the dining hall roof and dining hall interior within 30 days and provide DOL a follow-up safety inspection report within 30 days after completing the project.
3. Work with the National Park Service to investigate the location of the ranger firing range and obtain a written assessment from the Park Service of the risk to students and staff at the Oconaluftee Job Corps center within 30 days in order to determine whether the range should be relocated.

Due to the seriousness of the issues identified, we request that you take immediate action and respond to this report within 5 working days on actions taken. After receiving your response, we will include the response and this report on our website.

If you have any questions regarding the report's information, please contact me at 202-693-5170.

cc: Nancy Kaufman, National Park Service
Youth Services Director

AGENCY RESPONSE

U.S. Department of Labor

Office of Job Corps
Washington, D.C. 20210

JUL 17 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: ELLIOT P. LEWIS
Assistant Inspector General
for Audit

FROM: ESTHER R. JOHNSON Esther R. Johnson
National Director
Office of Job Corps

SUBJECT: ALERT REPORT—National Park Services Has not Assured the Safety and Health of Students and Staff at the Oconaluftee Job Corps Center
Report Number 26-06-001-01-370

This response is in reply to your July 7, 2006, memorandum thanking you for investigating our concerns at the Oconaluftee Job Corps Center and providing the National Park Service an ALERT REPORT that substantiates Job Corps' previously documented life safety hazards.

While the safety and health of our students at Oconaluftee is a Job Corps priority, we will continue to address and resolve these issues with the National Park Service. In this regard, I want to assure you that Job Corps has made every effort to implement a thorough and comprehensive system for the detection, reporting, and follow-up of health and safety deficiencies which has been effective for most of the 122 centers throughout the Job Corps system.

The reporting of these deficiencies by my staff, as cited in your memorandum, are but a few examples of the numerous attempts we have made to bring attention and remedy to these matters. At Oconaluftee, however, management has repeatedly failed to take the appropriate action in correcting serious life safety violations in a timely manner, disregarding all detection and back-up systems that we have in place. Nevertheless, we are hopeful that with the release of the ALERT REPORT, Park Service officials will thoroughly address these deficiencies as expeditiously as possible. If not, more serious consequences must result in order to protect the health and safety of students.

In an effort to expedite and correct deficiencies noted below, we have requested that the Park Service National Director provide Job Corps with a status report of the following items no later than August 11, 2006:

1. "Fire Detection and Alarm Systems are not operable in every building."

   While a number of these deficiencies are the result of a lack of routine maintenance, which we have repeatedly addressed with Park Service officials during both special and routine, on-site reviews, a number of

these problems now require resources to repair or replace existing equipment. Therefore, we have recently provided the Park Service adequate resources to accomplish this task in all center buildings requiring such action

2. "Food handling and storage areas in the dining hall have deteriorated due to long-term roof damage."

   While funding was provided several years ago to correct this problem, which was not nearly as severe as it is today, the work was never completed. Therefore, along with the PY 2006 interagency transfer to the Park Service, we have provided adequate resources to comprehensively correct this problem.

3. "the National Park Service ranger firing range is located too close to the OJCC student and staff population."

   We are requesting the Park Service National Director to prepare a written assessment of the risks to students and staff at the Oconaluftee center, including, if available, the precautions and safety measures utilized by other Federal agencies having similar sites adjacent to civilian populations. We are also requesting Park Service officials to immediately meet with appropriate officers managing the firing range to develop effective measures that will provide further warnings and protections to Job Corps students and staff.

Let me assure you that the actions described above will be closely monitored to ensure that all deficiencies are corrected as expeditiously as possible. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this response, please contact me directly at 202 693-3000.