

From 1993 to 2011, I was a management and technical consultant to the FAA in New England. My job was to solve difficult problems and to hire necessary disciplines that the FAA needed over a short period to solve unique needs. Many different environmental problems arose on a regular basis within the FAA and our multidiscipline contract hired engineers with the unique disciplines required to solve these problems as they arose.

The FAA manager, known as “Big C” tasked our contract with looking at all of the F AA environmental requirements. We were to notify them where they complied and where they did not comply. I convened a meeting consisting of four environmental engineers, one human resource engineer and myself as the project leader. Forty-four different environmental activities came under the auspices of the New England FAA. The team addressed each of these individually, spoke with the regular FAA environmental people involved with these activities and examined all of the paperwork associated with procedures and processes.

After three weeks, we had identified that 28 of the 44 environmental activities were not included. The remaining 16 had adequate processes and procedures that were actively pursued and recorded. We forwarded a report indicating this status of the environmental program to upper management of the FAA in New England. Initially the only response was to classify the document as confidential and limit its distribution to three copies. Other than that, nothing happened.

The manager and I went to see “Big C” and met with a very cold greeting and minimum conversation. My boss took the lead and summarized the report indicating that I had run the team and written the report itself. The FAA manager became noticeably cooler towards me. He advised my manager that he did not want me heading up any more reports for the environmental area. I had lots of other work so this did not bother me, and we left the meeting.

Over the next four weeks, I interacted with the environmental personnel involved, on an informal basis, asking them for an idea of what was going on. They indicated that they had weekly meetings with the FAA managers, but the report never came up and nothing happened.

At this time, a number of failures of environmental activities in other parts of the country resulted in major scandals. The Washington DC management sent out videos indicating that if managers were aware of a problem but they did nothing to address the problem, the highest level of managers who learned of the problem, would be the one designated as a potential felon. They would go to court as the responsible manager, and they could be subject to imprisonment in a federal prison.

I went to my manager and brought this to his attention indicating that part of our charter was to protect the management of the New England FAA personnel including the managers. I felt that this designated felon focus could affect “Big C” because he was the highest manager notified of the problem but he had done nothing to address it. At the time, I was a senior manager at Arthur D Little and as a company member, I had a mandate to support our customer and protect him from bad decisions.

Reluctantly my manager agreed to go with me to see “Big C” and personally advise him of the designated felon requirement and to advise him to address the 28 unresolved environmental activities. This meeting was positively frigid. Other than a couple of grunts, there was no communication from his side until he said, “The meeting is ended”.

Once again, I started sampling what was going on at the management meeting and by interrogating the environmental engineers under our auspices who attended the meetings. My boss was specifically told I was not to attend any of the meetings. For the next four weeks, the meetings focused on the 16 environmental activities that were acceptable. There was nothing I could do. I notified my corporate headquarters of the dilemma. They said I had notified the customer but he did not want to hear it so there is nothing else I could do except sit back and wait.

About six weeks later an environmental accident occurred at a remote location within the New England area. An asbestos release occurred when an order authorized operator drilled through a sealed wall into a contained area. Inadvertently, a tech released asbestos into a controlled area where union people were working. The alarms went off and the TV cameras arrived. Luckily nobody died, because this was one of the 28 areas that management ignored.

Half of my environmental staff went on 24-hour duty assisting their FAA counterparts in controlling the problem. The other half were in meetings discussing the lack of procedures for this area and inadvertently bringing the other 27 activities up on the table. The next day a memo of interest came out from that office listing all 28 activities and showing a schedule for addressing each one of the problems over the following year.

I brought this to the attention of my boss and told him we now have to notify “Big C” that he is no longer a designated felon because he now has written proof that he has addressed these 28 areas. My boss remembered our previous frigid meetings and told me I should go myself. We scheduled a meeting for both of us and my boss conveniently became sick that morning. When I arrived by myself I was again given a very cold reception. I told “Big C”,

“I’m very pleased to be able to tell you that you are no longer the designated felon for the environmental activities in New England. When you convened the meeting and addressed the 28 unresolved areas in writing, you met the legal requirements to show that

once you learned of the problem that you set up a team and meetings to address the problem. As we tried to explain at the original meeting, this is what you had to do to free you from a legal entitlement, which might have ended up in prison. Luckily no one was hurt in the accidental release of the asbestos and before the year is out you will have all 28 units under formal control.”

This meeting ended on a casual note but I noticed that “Big C” was sweating profusely. I believe the FAA lawyers had advised him of his potential liability, but I have no evidence other than my observation of his concern. We never became friends, but he paid attention to my advice in any written document after that.

THE END