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TVA to supply own nuke security Former employees allege harassment, lax practices

BY ANNE PAINE • STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 3, 2008

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The Tennessee Valley Authority plans to drop the privately contracted security guard service at its three nuclear power plants in favor of an in-house force, officials announced Tuesday.

The move came as The Tennessean prepared to publish reports of lax nuclear plant security from former employees.



The agency, which admitted no problems, said that an evaluation begun late last year has prompted the switch from Pinkerton Government Services guards, to enhance the agency's focus on health and safety.

TVA Chief Nuclear Officer Bill Campbell said in an e-mailed announcement that he was proud of the security operation and that the transition would improve "organizational alignment."

Kevin Sandkuhler, a Pinkerton spokesman, described TVA's policy decision as no indication of dissatisfaction.

"Our performance has been outstanding," he said. "They just decided they wanted to go in-house

with this."

The Swedish-owned company currently holds a \$159 million contract, begun in 2002 and ending next month, to keep the agency's three nuclear power plants, employees and the public safe.

The Tennessean had been told by two women working for Pinkerton and one in TVA's nuclear security office that they suffered a pattern of intimidation and eventually lost their jobs after bringing up safety breaches — from guards napping to inadequate training and malfunctioning radioactivity monitors.

Neither TVA's inspector general nor federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission officials offered much relief, said the women, all of whom contacted one or both offices.

Harassment Is Alleged

Linda Nadeau and Janet Conner worked at different plants.

"You can't open your mouth or they squash you," said Conner, 48, who until three months ago wore a uniform and combat boots and carried a weapon at TVA's Sequoyah Nuclear Plant northeast of Chattanooga.

"If you try to do your job the way you're supposed to do it, you're labeled a problem and they squash you."



Ann Harris, Gail Richards and Linda Nadeau have criticized practices at TVA nuclear plants.

(SHELLEY MAYS / THE TENNESSEAN)

GIF: TVA nuclear power plants

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She said that reports of negligence and threats led to harassment — from small things like late bathroom breaks to false accusations that she lost ammunition — and that she was pressured to sign a settlement after she was sidelined.

Sandkuhler said Pinkerton's dealings with Nadeau had been by the book and that Conner, who went through mediation and could have brought a lawyer, agreed to settle.

Gil Francis, TVA spokes man, said last week that [privacy](#) laws prevented talking about any cases but that "intimidation and harassment are not tolerated — period."

"Both TVA and Pinkerton have policies in place that encourage employees to raise security concerns as soon as they arise," he said. "We've got a multibillion-dollar investment in those plants. We want to make sure we've got the best security in place."

An NRC official would not address the cases either but said last week that the power producer is being investigated.

"There are some security issues we are looking into at TVA facilities," said Roger Hannah, an NRC spokesman in Atlanta. "We do have some issues. That's all I can tell you."

TVA's announcement Tuesday does not alter that, he said.

'Nobody Wants To Talk'

Ann Harris, a former TVA whistle-blower to whom the women turned to make sense of what happened to them, criticized NRC's oversight and TVA's and Pinkerton's complaint response, which she said is marked by denial and can cover up problems with [financial](#) settlements.

Employees who get beaten down and scared go away, and there's no public record of it, she said. That's the case whether employees work for TVA or Pinkerton, she said.

"They aren't investigating bad managers," Harris said. "Nobody wants to talk about it. "They want to keep everything quiet because new nuclear plants mean jobs."

TVA's board last summer approved a \$2.5 billion project to complete a nuclear reactor at Watts Bar southwest of Knoxville, where one of the women, Nadeau, worked.

Officials are also looking into building four new reactors at a site in northern Alabama for an unspecified amount of [money](#).

Gail Richards, 61, worked for 18 years in TVA's human resources office before transferring for more pay three years ago to the nuclear security department.

Her responsibilities included background checks and determining who would have access without escort into secure areas at the nuclear plants.

The first year her job evaluation praised her and said that she was "selected by her team members to conduct periodic reviews of their files for accuracy because she is so detail oriented," according to a document from her attorney, Lynne Bernabei of Washington, D.C.

It was prepared as part of an ongoing fight over her firing last December.

Richards said all changed when she began reporting problems, including that she wasn't adequately trained and that critical errors were occurring. She said unauthorized people — including a cleaning crew — had been allowed in secure areas without escorts.

Richards found herself harangued by her supervisor, and her own errors, though few, were magnified and distorted, she said.

She said Patrick Asendorf, TVA nuclear security manager, ordered her escorted off the grounds during a grievance hearing when she provided documents to counter charges about her performance.

He said the personnel documents had to be kept private and that she would be investigated by the NRC, she said.

Bernabei called his actions "outrageous," adding that the papers could be legally used and were the only way Richards could make her case.

"We get a call from the NRC that says we want to come investigate Gail Richards, but we don't want to investigate what she says is going on," the attorney said.

"That just shows what a cozy relationship there is between NRC and TVA — to the detriment of safety."

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'They Made My Life Hell'

Bernabei, who has represented TVA workers for years, said the agency has long-standing shortcomings related to whistle-blowers.

Conner hired on with Pinkerton in 2004 and found "they made my life hell" after she wrote statements about an official talking about his intentions of killing someone.

Also, she said she refused to sign a form in a way that would indicate a higher-up was there supervising, when he wasn't.

"He said he was going to have it shredded," she said. "They never did find it later."

Other documents vanished in a similar manner, she said.

"I got my car keyed. They called my husband — now my ex — in the middle of the night saying I was with a man. They would drive off just as I was getting ready to get in the van when I was posted near the river."

When a radiation monitor she had been given went off, a supervisor told her it wasn't working and to go on in an area without one, she said.

One arms-bearing colleague who was particularly angry with her was stalking her at work, but bosses didn't take it seriously, she said.

She was so upset that she eventually cried, as she told them how he was acting crazier than usual one day, glaring at her and blocking her way.

They did nothing to him, but sent her home "to rest" indefinitely without pay, she said. A month later, when she had no money for an attorney, they held a mediation session in which she was told she would never get a decent job again if she didn't settle.

Nadeau, 63, worked for TVA as a security guard before TVA privatized the service and pay cuts followed.

She left, returning in 2001 to make about \$8 an hour at Watts Bar Nuclear Plant.

"Guards didn't have the seriousness they used to have," she said. "You would find them like this," she said sprawling back in her chair with her mouth open as if asleep.

She said that at times, when she was monitoring a checkpoint X-ray machine, a guard would get close to the metal detector with a gun to trigger the alarm as a joke, when someone came through.

"They would say, 'It's OK. I know them,' " and let the person pass, she said.

"They should have gone through again. I had a supervisor behind me and I said, "Aren't you going to do something? He said, 'Shut your mouth and watch the X-ray machine.' "

She said her neatness fetish brought mean pranks, including one in which urine was put in a cleaning bottle she used. She was fired this summer, but successfully appealed a decision that had denied her unemployment benefits, she said.

Anne Paine can be reached at 615-259-8071 or apaine@tennessean.com.

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nashville244065 wrote:

Of course now they will have to appoint two or three additional vice presidents to run the security operations.
9/3/2008 10:01:57 AM

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MominTN wrote:

TVA better wise up, because a serious security breach is all that it would take to privatize them right out of business. Maybe this is a sign that they are going to take security more seriously.
9/3/2008 7:38:18 AM

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disgusted3121 wrote:



TVA has their own Police, maybe instead of being out here on I 40 or down on
broadway on fri nights making traffic stops they should be sitting at the plants.
9/3/2008 6:28:55 AM

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sanrucker wrote:

i hate to read stuff like this because i am reminded of my "shell-shocked" years at the
post office and ford. the p.o. had a no-fire clause in its contract and ford had 0%
tolerance for harassment. all fakes. the nightmares go on and on and on. man's
inhumanity to woman as well as, often-time, to man.
9/3/2008 5:58:56 AM

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st8of10ec wrote:

I can't speak on security at TVA's nukes but the security at it's coal fired plants is
laughable.I'll guarantee you that I or anybody with half a brain could walk right in to
any TVA coal fired plant in Middle Tn. with a
plan a 3rd grader could draw up.What gets me is that that if you have any open court
date on your record
regardless of the severity or lack there of you can't work at a TVA plant until it's
resolved,because you
are a security risk regardless of how many times you've worked there in the past.But
a terrorist could
throw on a hardhat & a lunch bucket & stroll right into any one of Middle Tn's main
power producing plants & wreck havoc.Do I have any faith in TVA's ability to provide
a more secure setting?If you've
ever spent much time around TVA you already know the answer to that question,NO!!
9/3/2008 3:30:17 AM

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