

# Executive Resigns in Storm Over Sleeping Guards

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Wackenhut, a private security firm that guards 21 commercial nuclear power plants around the United States, said yesterday that its chief executive resigned during continuing controversy about guards caught napping at a [Pennsylvania](#) reactor last year.

Gary A. Sanders had been Wackenhut's chairman and chief executive since 2003. Over the past year, Sanders has been engulfed by allegations of lapses in security at nuclear plants, an audit over whether it overcharged the city of [Miami](#) for transit guards, and a bitter dispute with the [Service Employees International Union](#).

Last month, [Exelon](#), the largest U.S. private nuclear power generator, terminated Wackenhut's contract to protect the utility's 10 nuclear plants. An Exelon spokesman said Wackenhut standards were not Exelon's standards.

The [House Energy and Commerce Committee](#) said Monday that it would hold a hearing to look into the Pennsylvania incident and why the [Nuclear Regulatory Commission](#) failed to respond to a Wackenhut whistleblower who tried to draw regulators' attention to the problem of sleeping security guards.

Wackenhut has already erased from its Web site the biography of Sanders, who had started working for the company in 1981 as a supervisor in [Atlanta](#) and who eventually ran each of its two major divisions for nuclear and other security services. The company did not give any reasons for his departure, saying in a news release that Sanders "has left the company" and that "a decision was taken to realign the reporting structure."

Wackenhut, based in Miami, has 35,000 employees and does a range of security work that includes guarding libraries, transporting immigration detainees for the [Department of Homeland Security](#), and protecting the government's Y-12 complex at Oak Ridge, [Tenn.](#), where nuclear weapons and materials are stored and maintained. Wackenhut is owned by the British firm Group 4 Securicor, which said its chief operating officer, Grahame Gibson, would take responsibility for Wackenhut operations.

"Mr. Sanders had helped develop G4S Wackenhut to become the leading manned security company in the U.S., with a strong commitment to employees, excellent customer relationships, and a reputation for quality," the company said. "We would like to thank Mr. Sanders and wish him the best of luck in the future."

Andy Stern, president of the Service Employees International Union, took a different view. "It's no wonder that Wackenhut's CEO stepped down after they lost their Exelon contract," he said in a statement. "They need to fulfill their security mandate and treat their own workforce fairly and safely, too."

The union has worked to highlight Wackenhut's lapses and has focused the attention of many members of Congress on the company. Wackenhut security procedures have also been criticized in four reports of the [Energy Department's](#) inspector general.

But the image of sleeping security guards, captured on a videotape aired last fall by a [CBS](#) affiliate in

Pennsylvania, has become the most vivid and troublesome incident for Wackenhut. The video was made by Kerry Beal, a Wackenhut employee disturbed by the regular napping of his fellow guards.

After the video aired, Wackenhut fired the guards who were sleeping.

Nonetheless, Exelon canceled Wackenhut's contract last month and said it would take security operations in-house.

On Dec. 14, [Sen. Robert P. Casey Jr. \(D-Pa.\)](#) wrote a letter to Sanders calling Wackenhut's response to Beal's early alerts "unacceptable."

In an angry five-page reply to Casey, Sanders said the sleeping guards were an issue "at one specific shift of personnel at that site only." He said Wackenhut management was not aware of Beal's allegations until the video aired, though Beal's lawyer, David Wachtel, said his client alerted his supervisors, who told him to be a "team player."

Sanders also questioned Exelon's decision to fire Wackenhut. He said that "security is not a core competency of the energy manufacturer" and that "it will be a challenge for them to conduct security operations better than Wackenhut."

A separate dispute remains over Exelon, which has hired many of the Wackenhut guards but did not hire Beal. Exelon said he did not meet the criteria, but Wachtel said Exelon cited a one-day suspension that Beal received for being eight minutes late for work one day. The suspension was given after Beal tried to alert supervisors to the sleeping guards.

Beal and Exelon have reached a settlement, but a congressional investigator said he was still concerned about the "chilling effect" Exelon's decision would have on other potential whistleblowers.