

Tiffany Anderson

2 North Avena Avenue
Lodi , CA 95240

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California Department Of Industrial Relations
Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH)
4206 Technology Drive, Suite 3
Modesto, CA 95356

Regarding: San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control Department

Dear DOSH:

This is my follow-up letter to elaborate upon the hazardous working conditions at the San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control Department ("Mosquito Dept.") I wish to address hazards at two Mosquito Dept. locations:

1. White Slough / Fish Facility, 12755 North Thornton Road, Lodi, CA 95240, and
2. The Main Office, 7759 South Airport Way, Stockton, CA 95206.

I wrote to you in 2009 at the suggestion of my then-attorney. I witnessed and was subjected to dangerous working conditions that ultimately led to my having three knee surgeries. These surgeries ended my ability to return to physically-demanding work and resulted in permanent, lifetime limitations.

My ex-employer, the Mosquito Dept., was managed by John Stroh and then-assistant (now current) manager Eddie Luchessi. I worked at the Mosquito Dept. from April 2004 until July 2012. The Mosquito Dept. hired me after I did well on their written test but knowing that I lacked the qualifications/experience needed to perform my duties without special training and accommodations. The actual job requirements were physically demanding, required critical thinking, and prolonged on-the-job training for most new hires. With a learning curve of 5 to 7 years to be considered "experienced", direct supervision and training are critical. During the training phase, the support of seasoned operators working alongside plus a supervisor in the field are necessary to avoid or minimize hazards. A new hire is usually not moved from a zone within the first three years to allow for familiarization. The state-mandated A & B certifications give an

employee the license to spray but they do not address the obstacles or preparation needed to perform the task safely.

Two months into my employment, in June of 2004, I was sent to urgent care by my supervisor who mandated that I file a DWC-1 form and report a rash due to an exposure to an unknown agent. In January of 2005 I had a second exposure to an unknown agent when I was assigned to prune rose bushes and load the clippings at the Mosquito Dept.'s own White Slough facility. By the day's end, my entire body was covered with an extreme rash and welts. Again my supervisor mandated that I report and seek treatment.

During my second year of employment, I was removed from a light-duty zone in the relatively-safe environment of Linden (zone 7) to a zone that demanded a high level of knowledge, "the islands" (zone 9). I lacked the skills and training to safely make this transition. Management used to mandate that supervisors enforce safety codes for the employees. My then-supervisor Duane Bridgewater assigned our crew to work in teams of two in the field for safety measures. He also actively supervised our work. We were a team then and I always felt safe under his supervision.

In September of 2005 I was assigned to inspect flooded crops west of Interstate 5. In the process of taking a sample of standing water, the ground below me caved in and I found myself shoulder-deep in water. This water supply was purposefully created by the farmer for crop rotation and included nitrogen, sulfur, and unspecified chemicals. This resulted in my third exposure. My supervisor mandated that I again report and seek medical attention. Once again I developed a rash, coupled with a sore throat, and a form of chronic fatigue syndrome.

It was not until a 2011 Grand Jury investigation that I was informed by the district attorney that my employer had previously used the chemical Formalin at the White Slough facility (documentation exists for 2007, 2008, and 2009), without informing the employees. I suspect it had been used in prior years as well. When the strongest chemicals such as this one are used, employees have a right to know what they are being exposed to; Formalin is the strongest chemical that we used at the Mosquito Dist. If an employee shows symptoms that align with the producer's warnings, then the employer has an obligation to inform the employee so that a treating physician can perform the proper tests. In my opinion, what manager Stroh and assistant manager Luchessi did in not advising us of the Formalin use, was at the least grossly negligent and possibly criminal. After that second exposure, I was chronically sick and didn't understand what was happening to me. I had previously been a very healthy person. Instead of management caring about my well-being, I was subjected to banter and ridicule of my chronic condition by the men who applied the chemicals and conspired to hide their applications.

My prior supervisor, as stated above, was Duane Bridgewater. Mr. Bridgewater worked for the Mosquito Dept. for approximately 39 years. I worked under him in the central region until he was reassigned in January of 2007 to the region that included the White Slough facility. Mr. Bridgewater worked at and around the White Slough facility until he retired in March of 2008. During the years that I knew him, Mr. Bridgewater was hospitalized intermittently with unexplained diagnoses. Mr. Bridgewater died within ten months of his retirement, on January 14, 2009, at the age of 59. It is my contention that Mr. Bridgewater had also been exposed to harmful chemicals, perhaps over many years while working for the Mosquito Dept. Manager Stroh and assistant manager Luchessi had a duty to provide the chemical treatment information to all employees; Doing so could have led to Mr. Bridgewater's doctor(s) to perform the proper tests and pursue the correct treatment.

I feared losing my job due to my being sick. I was treated like a liability so I downplayed my symptoms. I used my accrued vacation days and sick leave hoping to deflect retribution and the disapproval that I was experiencing both verbally and on my evaluations by management.

Beginning around 2006, one of the Mosquito Dept. supervisors, Bob Durham, began having a workplace affair with a female subordinate and all the employee safety measures seemed to stop. The husband of the female subordinate threatening to kill them both and had beaten up supervisor Durham once. Management then reassigned employees to specific areas in an effort to protect supervisor Durham. It was then that supervisor Durham stopped doing his job, stopped actively supervising his crew. Supervisor Durham (who became my supervisor in January of 2007), simply stopped going out into the field and remained in his office virtually all day, every day.

Supervisor Durham's female subordinate began to get preferential treatment. She didn't have to do her job. She wouldn't go to her area and was allowed to stay in the office. Several hazardous situations arose from this workplace affair: a supervisor failed to supervise, an employee failed to work which caused more work for the other field technicians, upper management refused to enforce any of the Memorandum of Understanding policy rules regarding nepotism / conflicts of interest / equal pay for equal work. Overall, there was a decline in employee morale.

More specifically, the female subordinate openly declared that she did not need a supervisor to work with her or a "safety buddy" in field operations. This female subordinate ceased doing her job and spent much of her day on her cell phone and meeting secretly with supervisor Durham out of the office, not in the field. This workplace affair changed upper management's thinking in regards to employees not needing to have their supervisors available and teams of two becoming an unnecessary safety measure. This female subordinate had less than two years experience, so upper management erroneously reasoned that if she was working her zone alone, then we all could do so. Please keep in mind that all 18 zones have very different physical/terrain hazards.

My region's supervisor, Durham, stop assisting his crew in the field and primarily sat in the office every day with the other two region supervisors; they all stopped actively supervising their crews. Job demands were asked of me that were impossible to accomplish. Supervisor Durham was new to my region, so he was unaware of what the field conditions actually were; He was asking his employees to perform tasks that he did not fully grasp himself.

For example, he assigned me to pull manhole covers on all four corners of intersections in the city of Tracy, for 6 hours. When I asked city employees how they pulled the manhole covers, they replied that they only did it in teams of two, not alone. These manhole covers weigh about 80 pounds each. A newly-hired employee burned up his brand new work truck up because supervisors did not warn him to watch out for parking a hot vehicle in tall grasses. Supervisor Heine instructed that same new hire to put on waders and walk through a pond in Ripon to inspect it. That employee was ordered to go alone but he refused because he was concerned for his safety. In cutting nearby trees, we then discovered that said pond was over 20 feet deep. Had that employee tried to wade through, he could have drowned.

In 2007 I filed a written sexual harassment complaint against supervisor Durham and his female subordinate and requested mediation from a neutral third party; that request was denied by upper management. I was instead immediately reassigned to zone 18. All past protocols were broken.

The usual 3 year period in a zone to become familiar with it was not followed. I had no dairy experience or knowledge. My supervisor did not make himself available to me like I had witnessed over the past 4 years. No one showed me around the zone for the first week as had also been the usual protocol. My supervisor had knowledge of my past knee surgeries yet still sent me on physically demanding assignments. In fact, one of the last field technicians assigned to this area had to take a medical retirement due to two busted knee caps. I believe that I was intentionally placed in the most physically-demanding area in response to my grievances. The supervisors failed to provide safe access to the dairy ponds. The supervisors also failed to take action against excessive irrigation practices. All of these factors required me to walk in waist high water while the mud below sucked on my boots, pulling at my leg muscles and further damaging my body.

When I returned to work from my last knee operation in 2009, I was assigned a new work truck. While that may not sound out of ordinary in most work settings, it was unusual for the Mosquito Dept. In the years that I was there it had never been done before. The truck that I was originally assigned was new and I (being very conscious of germs) kept it spotlessly clean. The replacement truck was full of trash. It used to be driven by a messy co-worker who smoked cigarettes in it. It took me hours to clean it up. The most important point, however, for this letter is the fact that all of the controls, all of the buttons, knobs, and switches were directly opposite of those on my prior truck. I was not told of them being set up in this way. I cannot confirm that they were not intentionally reversed on me. Perhaps it was just meant to aggravate me. Or worse, to get me to accidentally spray some chemicals on the wrong area, or to waste chemicals. Either one of those events could have cost me my job. It was dangerous not to have my supervisor advise me of the truck's specifics and I'm fortunate to have discovered them on my own.

Even seasoned field technicians can be put in harm's way if working alone. On one occasion such a field technician fell into a deep hole that was hidden. Luckily for him, he was with a new hire who was able to get him out. While inspecting a dairy in 2010, I was walking along a path where the farmer had dug an illegal, hidden manure dump hole; it was approximately 8 feet deep. I was fortunate to get out of that hole with the assistance of that farmer. I did not have safety buddy / co-worker with me by then.

My overall point in this letter is to make working at the Mosquito Dist. safer for both the current and future employees of that independent agency. Some people may believe that they need a job so desperately that they won't even question the safety risks. That is a dangerous way of thinking. It was once the pride and focus of the Mosquito Dept. supervisors and upper management to protect their crews out in the field. I was there to witness the tremendous shift away from direct supervision and to independent field work. That, from all that I've written above, may eventually lead to catastrophic consequences someday. I'm hoping that by writing to your office now that no one else is harmed as badly as I was, or even worse.

If there is more information that you need from me, then please let me know. I appreciate your reading this letter and your attention to these specific workplace dangers. I have tried to be as specific as possible so that your inspectors will know exactly what to inspect, review, and request. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Anderson