
SIGHTINGS

Navy Doctor Blows Whistle... And Naval Career

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MORGANTOWN, W.Va. (AP) - A doctor who went public with his belief the Navy may have misdiagnosed hundreds of sailors exposed to potentially lethal mineral dust says he was fired late Monday for insubordination. Dr. Philip Jajosky, an outspoken medical investigator and 23-year veteran of the U.S. Public Health Service, was ordered to pack up his belongings, then escorted out of his office at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health here.

The termination was characterized as an "involuntary retirement," Jajosky said.

His firing comes more than two months after closed hearings in Rockville, Md., where a panel discussed allegations Jajosky had defied the chain of command and performed poorly at work.

Jajosky raised a red flag in 1992 after researching the case of an ex-sailor from Albany, Ga., and a decision by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to change his diagnosis.

The patient, Jerry Cochran, helped scrape adhesive off the decks of aircraft carriers during the 1970s, stirring up and inhaling dust.

The old diagnosis was sarcoidosis, a rare lung disorder with no known cause. The new diagnosis identified silicosis, a chronic respiratory disease caused by inhaling silica, a hard, glassy mineral.

The change and Jajosky's report to the Navy led to a recommendation by the VA that its 172 medical centers perform detailed medical histories on affected sailors.

There are no known estimates of how many could be at risk.

Jajosky's opinions on the sarcoidosis cases, if validated,

could have enormous financial ramifications for the Navy. Compensation and disability payments to those who have suffered or died of lung disease could become possibilities.

Jajosky contends his research cost him his job.

"I didn't just pop on the scene and say, 'I'm going to raise hell.' Everything was fine in my career until I got involved in this investigation," Jajosky said Monday night.

Jajosky's supervisor, Bill Eschenbacher, did not immediately return a telephone message left at NIOSH offices Monday night.

SIGHTINGS HOMEPAGE

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