

Summary: Investigation of False Claims by BIA Firefighters

Report Date: March 24, 2015

We completed an investigation into allegations that several Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) firefighters submitted false overtime claims in 2009. Specifically, the complainant alleged the overtime hours the BIA firefighters worked were unnecessary because their area of responsibility experienced a cool and wet fire season.

Our investigation found that a deputy superintendent claimed overtime amounting to approximately \$30,000, a fire management officer claimed approximately \$56,000, and a supervisory wildland fire operations specialist claimed approximately \$29,000. The fire management officer admitted he was not needed for some of the hours he claimed. Michael Twiss, the supervisory wildland fire operations specialist, admitted the three employees claimed overtime based upon hours worked when they were not really needed. Twiss indicated the overtime the three employees needlessly worked was essentially standby time. Twiss estimated the three employees did not need to work at least 50 percent, and as much as 80 percent, of the overtime BIA paid them in 2009.

We also found that Twiss falsified the deputy superintendent's arduous duty pack test results. The test requires firefighters to carry a 45-pound backpack and walk 3 miles in less than 45 minutes. The deputy superintendent would have been determined unfit for duty without the falsified test results. The deputy superintendent denied he needlessly worked wildland firefighting hours in 2009 and claimed he passed the duty pack test that same year.

Twiss pled guilty to a single count of theft in U.S. District Court for the District of South Dakota. The fire management officer was acquitted of theft and making false statements. Charges against the deputy superintendent were dismissed at the request of the United States attorney.

This is a summary of an investigative report that was issued to BIA for action. Twiss resigned, BIA entered into a last chance agreement with the fire management officer, and the deputy superintendent had previously retired from BIA.

