



The City of New York
Department of Investigation

ROSE GILL HEARN
COMMISSIONER

80 MAIDEN LANE
NEW YORK, NY 10038
212-825-5900

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nyc.gov/doi

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CONTACT: ERIN BYRNE
(212) 825-5931

DOI ARRESTS EIGHT DEP EMPLOYEES IN BRIBERY SCHEMES

ROSE GILL HEARN, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Investigation (DOI), announced today the arrest of eight New York City Department of Environmental Protection (“DEP”) employees for their participation in bribery schemes in which the DEP employees were paid multiple bribes in amounts ranging from \$20 to \$500 in order to expedite various services provided by DEP to subsurface (water main and sewer main) plumbing contractors. Seven of the eight defendants were DEP “tappers” whose job it is to make connections to the City’s water distribution system. (The names of the seven tappers who were arrested are listed below.) An additional tapper has also been charged with bribery and is being sought for arrest. The eighth defendant arrested for accepting bribes was CHERYL MITCHELL, a DEP Principal Administrative Associate assigned to process paperwork related to the connections.

Those arrested face charges that include Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, Receiving Unlawful Gratuities and Conspiracy.

DEP is the agency of the City government which is responsible for, among other things, managing the City’s water distribution system. DEP’s Bureau of Water & Sewer Operations (BWSO) is responsible for making the initial water (“wet”) connection to all City water mains and maintaining the water distribution system. Under City regulations, only a DEP Construction Laborer can make a connection to the City’s water distribution system on behalf of a private plumber. The DEP Construction Laborers who perform this work are known as “tappers.” The purpose of this rule is to ensure that all connections to the water distribution system are up to code and performed in a professional manner – to minimize leaks and, ultimately, water main breaks. Once these “wet” connections are made by the DEP, the private plumbing company performs all other plumbing work necessary to connect a building with water service. However, DOI discovered that this role performed by DEP tappers created a significant corruption hazard. The investigation has uncovered evidence that the practice of taking bribes is widespread and some tappers have admitted to reaping thousands of dollars a year in bribes. There are approximately twenty tappers in the DEP, four per borough.

In order to expose this scheme, DOI inserted an undercover investigator to work for several months in a full-time covert capacity as a laborer, digging ditches around water mains, for a plumbing company that needed to utilize tappers to make connections to City water mains. During the course of this covert assignment, the undercover DOI investigator often worked twelve hour days digging ditches to expose water mains located several feet under City streets in weather conditions that ranged from sweltering heat to freezing rain. During the covert operation, the DOI undercover made numerous cash payments, ranging from \$20 to \$100, to DEP BWSO tappers. During the investigation, DOI developed evidence that the “tappers” generally received a \$20 - \$50 cash payment from contractors for virtually every “tap” installed by DEP for one or two family residential buildings and a \$50-\$100 cash payment from contractors for larger wet connections for multiple dwelling residencies or commercial buildings. The purpose of the cash payments to the tappers was to expedite the installation of the wet connection by DEP, and sometimes to buy extra time to properly prepare the excavated hole. The preparation of the hole should be done prior to the arrival of the DEP tappers, but if the hole wasn’t ready, the contractors would offer a bribe so the tappers would wait on site to install the tap. The DOI undercover investigator made the cash payments to the DEP employees while working in Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and The Bronx.

The tappers arrested are:

SANTO CURATOLO, 37, of Bayside, NY, has been a DEP Construction Laborer since 1997 and earns approximately \$49,924 annually. He is charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, Receiving Unlawful Gratuities, and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree.

JOHN LOMANDO, 37, of Richmond Hill, NY, has been a DEP Construction Laborer since 1989 and earns approximately \$49,924. He is charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, Receiving Unlawful Gratuities, and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree.

ULRIC MIEREZ, 54, of Brooklyn, NY, has been a DEP Construction Laborer since 1988 and earns approximately \$49,924 annually. He is charged with Conspiracy in the Fifth and Sixth Degrees.

JOSEPH MORELLI, 44, of Ozone Park, NY, has been a DEP Pipe Caulker since 1981. He is charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, and Receiving Unlawful Gratuities.

VINCENT SCAVUZZO, 29, of Staten Island, NY, has been a DEP Construction Laborer since 1996 and earns approximately \$49,924 annually. He is charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, Receiving Unlawful Gratuities, and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree.

ROBERT SNEDECOR, 49, of Whitestone, NY, has been a DEP Construction Laborer since 2001 and earns approximately \$49,924 annually. He is charged with Receiving Unlawful Gratuities and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree.

MICHAEL VESCERA, 41, of Staten Island, NY, has been a DEP Construction Laborer since 2001 and earns approximately \$49,924 annually. He is charged with Bribe Receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving Reward for Official Misconduct in the Second Degree, Receiving Unlawful Gratuities, and Conspiracy in the Fifth Degree.

In a second related bribery scheme, CHERYL MITCHELL, a Principal Administrative Associate for DEP's BWSO in the Division of Permitting and Connections, is charged with receiving six payments from two DOI undercover investigators ranging from \$200 to \$500 each, for a total of \$1,900, in order to expedite the scheduling of inspections of subsurface plumbing work by DEP inspectors and to expedite the issuance of "tap letters" or "sign offs," nicknames for DEP Certificates of Inspection for completed subsurface work. These certificates signified that the work performed by the private contractor was in conformity with applicable DEP codes and regulations. This work included all external subsurface plumbing work (pipes, etc.) that connected a building to the City water main. The inspector's "sign-off" was required before the DEP BWSO Division of Permitting & Connections, MITCHELL's unit, issued the final Certificate of Inspection to the contractor. These certificates are important to contractors because they are generally not paid by their clients until a tap letter is issued by DEP. In an attempt to cover her tracks, MITCHELL's practice was to have the DOI undercover investigator drop off the cash payments at her mother's house in Brooklyn. In addition to these six bribes, a wire tap of MITCHELL's DEP telephone yielded evidence of additional bribery activity she engaged in with numerous contractors. MITCHELL, 46, of Brooklyn, earns approximately \$38,252 annually and has been charged with Bribe receiving in the Third Degree, Receiving reward for official misconduct in the Second Degree, Receiving unlawful gratuities and Conspiracy. If convicted, she faces up to seven years in prison.

DOI Commissioner Rose Gill Hearn said, "By accepting bribes and unlawful gratuities for performing their work functions, these defendants have dug themselves into a deep hole. These employees overlooked the fact that their paychecks are the only compensation they are supposed to accept for doing their jobs. They dishonor the vast majority of honest City workers who work hard for New Yorkers each day."

Commissioner Gill Hearn thanked New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer and the New York State Organized Crime Task Force for the prosecution of these cases which are so important to the City, and for their assistance with the investigation, particularly for obtaining the court-authorized electronic eavesdropping used by DOI during the investigation. Commissioner Gill Hearn also thanked the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Public Corruption Squad for their assistance in this investigation.

Commissioner Gill Hearn also thanked DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd for her support and cooperation in this investigation.

DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd said, "Taking bribes to give preferential treatment is not only illegal, it betrays the public trust. I applaud DOI's zealous pursuit of wrongdoing. Their investigation will help us improve our procedures to avoid future misdeeds, and to support the hard work of the many honest and dedicated employees at DEP."

This investigation was conducted by DOI's Inspector General John B. Kantor and members of his staff, including Deputy Inspector General Michael Carroll and Assistant Inspector General Michael Healy. Inspector General Christopher Staackmann was also thanked for his participation in this investigation. John Kantor will serve as the prosecutor on these cases in his designated capacity of Deputy Attorney General for the New York State Attorney General's Organized Crime Task Force. We also thank the Offices of Queens District Attorney Richard Brown and New York County District Attorney Robert Morgenthau who will each prosecute one of the defendants.

Criminal complaints are accusations. Defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

DOI is one of the oldest law-enforcement agencies in the country. The agency investigates and refers for prosecution City employees and contractors engaged in corrupt or fraudulent activities or unethical conduct. Investigations may involve any agency, officer, elected official or employee of the City, as well as those who do business with or receive benefits from the City.

***Get the worms out of the Big Apple.
To report someone ripping off the city, call DOI at (212) 825-5959.***