

# Former PG&E auditor sues utility, claiming he was fired for reporting safety issues

Worker claims he was fired for attempting to report serious safety issues at utility

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By Phil Johnson, Daily Journal Staff Writer

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Daily Journal, San Francisco (May 7, 2015) -- A former Pacific Gas and Electric Co. auditor, whose attorney says the utility "does not do anything about safety," alleges in a lawsuit that he was fired for reporting serious safety issues.

Thomas Jones said he found a "shockingly high error rate on almost every job" he examined in San Jose after being hired by Canus Corp. to audit PG&E inspectors, according to the lawsuit, filed last week in San Francisco County Superior Court against both PG&E and Canus.

The complaint alleges Jones, 66, made several attempts to report his findings to upper management, but was prevented from doing so by his immediate supervisors. When Jones persisted, he was told his job had ended due to a lack of work. *Jones v. Pacific Gas and Electric Company*, CGC-15-545620 (S.F. County Super. Ct., filed May 1, 2015).

Jones is suing for wrongful termination, employment discrimination and retaliation.

"It's the same old problems with PG&E," said Bryan J. McCormack, a partner with McCormack and Erlich LLP who represents Jones. "They absolutely do not care about safety issues. They sweep problems under the rug."

Jones was a career PG&E employee, working more than 40 years with the company. In 2006, he was hired by Canus to audit work performed by PG&E employees and subcontractors. McCormack said Jones was paid by Canus Corporation, but supervised by PG&E, amounting to joint employment.

"He checked utility poles for compliance," McCormack said. "And it was some of the worst work he had ever seen. He found numerous infractions per pole."

Jones began mentioning his concerns at weekly inspection meetings, once going as far as showing a PowerPoint presentation detailing the Public Utility Commission violations the complaint alleges he routinely found. McCormack described the violations as hazardous to PG&E employees and the public.

The lawsuit alleges Jones' boss, Joe Adello, and Adello's supervisor, Ben Chung, ignored the reported violations. According to the complaint, that changed in August 2014 when Jones told Adello he intended to inform upper management of the severity of the violations.

"Adello responded that he could not do that because a lot of people could lose their jobs," the complaint reads. Jones alleges he continued to pursue a conversation with upper management until he was told in September that he was no longer needed at the company.

The lawsuit seeks lost wages, benefits, punitive damages and an injunction preventing the utility from ignoring safety concerns.

The lawsuit follows a record-setting \$1.6 billion penalty assessed against the utility by state regulators for its role in the 2010 gas-pipeline explosion in San Bruno that killed eight people and destroyed 38 homes.

The utility also faces a 28-count indictment on federal obstruction of justice and pipeline safety charges.

"This case represents the same mindset," McCormack said.

Neither PG&E nor Canus responded to requests for comment Wednesday.

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