



Memorandum



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To: The Honorable Daniella Levine Cava, Mayor, Miami-Dade County
The Honorable Oliver G. Gilbert, III, Chairman
and Members, Board of County Commissioners, Miami-Dade County

From: Felix Jimenez, Inspector General 

Date: August 31, 2023

Subject: Case Concludes Against Ten Individuals Charged with Cheating on the State of Florida Elevator Safety Certificate of Competency Exam, Ref. IG 21-0008-I

A joint investigation by the Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG), the Miami-Dade Police Department Airport District, and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office, concluded today with the plea and sentence of the last of ten individuals arrested and charged with Cheating and Organized Scheme to Defraud in connection with elevator safety examinations. The case stemmed from the OIG's review of elevator safety at Miami International Airport (MIA) based on a referral from the County's Internal Services Department (ISD) regarding bypassed safety devices on moving walkways at MIA.

The Miami-Dade County Aviation Department (MDAD) contracted with Oracle Elevator Company (Oracle) to provide elevator maintenance and repair of the elevators, escalators, and moving walkways at MIA.¹ During the review of the bypassed safety devices, the OIG received information alleging a cheating scheme.² The joint investigation resulted in charges, filed in November 2022, against ten individuals (nine elevator mechanics and one supervisor). Eight defendants were former Oracle mechanics, and two defendants were former Schindler Elevator Corporation (Schindler) mechanics.

Many of the employees hired to work at MIA were recruited by Oracle from Puerto Rico, which does not require the licensing of elevator mechanics. The OIG learned that County elevator safety personnel began demanding proof of licensure from Oracle mechanics working at MIA and found that some were unlicensed "helpers."

Gabriel Alfonso, a former Oracle warehouse employee with no experience in elevator maintenance or repair, became a middleman between the mechanics and then Oracle supervisor, David Valles-Gomez, who took the test for the mechanics. The unlicensed mechanics registered with Elevator World, Inc. (the exam administrator for the State of Florida) and provided the username and password to Mr. Alfonso. Mr. Valles-Gomez took

¹ The County terminated its contact with Oracle on June 10, 2022.

² Oracle received the same information and terminated the employees allegedly involved. Schindler Elevator Corporation also terminated its mechanics and a supervisor allegedly involved.

the exams using the identifiers provided by the mechanics. Mr. Alfonso and Mr. Valles-Gomez charged between \$250 and \$400 for each exam and split the fee. The OIG found that, at some point during the scheme, Mr. Valles-Gomez cut out Mr. Alfonso as the middleman and pocketed the entire fee to take a test.

The employees used the falsely obtained State certification to fraudulently acquire annual Certificates of Competency in elevator repair and maintenance from the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation (DBPR). Not all the fraudulently licensed Oracle mechanics were assigned to MIA.

All ten individuals cooperated with the State Attorney's Office by providing sworn testimony regarding the fraudulent licensing and the investigation relating to the bypassing of safety devices on elevators, escalators, and moving walkways at MIA. Two mechanics, who had self-reported their fraud to DBPR and agreed to cooperate with further investigations, had their charges dismissed. They had stipulated to civil sanctions well before their arrests and had entered settlement agreements with DBPR involving the invalidation of their licenses and other civil fines and penalties.

The cases against the remaining individuals concluded today with Mr. Alfonso's guilty plea. In addition to the two individuals' cases described above, the cases against the eight remaining individuals were resolved as follows:

- Mr. Valles-Gomez was sentenced to five years of reporting probation
- Mr. Alfonso was sentenced to four years of reporting probation
- Two defendants, who permanently relocated to Puerto Rico, pled *in absentia* and were sentenced to two years of probation
- Four defendants entered into a program for first time offenders

In addition, the above eight defendants were required to pay costs of investigation and prosecution, stipulate that their mechanics license with the State of Florida are invalid, and stipulate that they are ineligible to take a new elevator mechanic exam for two years.

The OIG is grateful for the cooperation of ISD's Office of Elevator Safety and MDAD throughout this entire review.

cc: Jimmy Morales, Chief Operations Officer, Office of the Mayor
Ralph Cutié, Director, Miami-Dade Aviation Department
Stephanie V. Daniels, Interim Director, Miami-Dade Police Department
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