




Memorandum



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To: Josiel Ferrer-Diaz, Interim Director
Department of Transportation and Public Works

From: Felix Jimenez, Inspector General 

Date: February 18, 2025

Subject: Allegations of Safety Violations at Miami-Dade Central Bus Depot
Body Shop, Ref. IG 24-0356-C

On November 25, 2024, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) received a complaint alleging life-safety violations at the Department of Transportation and Public Works' (DTPW's) Central Bus Depot. The complaint was referred to the OIG by the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office. Specifically, the complaint alleged violations of safety protocols and the circumvention of de-fueling procedures of buses operating on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). It was alleged that employees were being ordered by the administration to violate protocols to expedite repair time.

The OIG took immediate action and conducted unannounced site inspections and interviewed randomly selected employees of both the Central Bus Depot's body and maintenance shops. The OIG's inquiry determined that the allegations are unfounded.

A copy of the Preliminary Inquiry Closure report is attached. Please do not hesitate to contact me if further information is needed. We appreciate the cooperation of DTPW staff during this review.

Attachment

cc: Jimmy Morales, Chief Operations Officer
Tim VanderGiesen, Division Chief of the Public Corruption Unit,
Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office



PRELIMINARY INQUIRY CLOSURE

COMPLAINT Re: Allegations of Safety Violations at Miami-Dade Central Bus Depot Body Shop

COMPLAINT No: 24-0356-C

The Miami-Dade County (County) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated a preliminary inquiry predicated on a complaint against the Department of Transportation and Public Works' Central Bus Depot located at 3295 NW 31st Street. The complaint was referred to the OIG by the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO) on November 25, 2024.¹

The complainant alleged numerous safety violations taking place in the Central Bus Depot's Major Overhaul Body Shop.² The safety violation allegations specifically focused on the buses operating on Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and welding and grinding work performed on and around the CNG tanks, without following the proper de-fueling protocols.³

Due to the safety concerns alleged in the complaint, the OIG took immediate action. On November 25, 2024, the same day of the SAO referral, the OIG conducted an unannounced site inspection. Another unannounced site inspection was conducted the next day. The OIG randomly selected employees at the Central Bus Depot's body shop and maintenance shop to interview. The employees interviewed included Technicians and Mechanic Technicians. The OIG also interviewed supervisors, including the

¹ The complaint also mentioned hiring violations and abuse of power. Those same issues were addressed in a prior complaint IG 23-0056-C and were not reviewed during this inquiry.

² The body shop (referred to as the Major Overhaul Body Shop) handles bodywork repair to the exterior or interior of buses, the maintenance shop focuses on routine repairs and preventive maintenance.

³ CNG, although lighter than air and able to rise and disperse rapidly, is stored at very high pressure and must be handled properly or could be dangerous. The Bus Depot has strict policies and procedures to work on CNG buses. If tanks are damaged or work needs to be done around them, they are de-fueled. To de-fuel, buses are taken to the Fuel Island, connected to the pump station, and drained.

Superintendent of Central Bus Depot. Finally, the OIG toured the fueling island.⁴ The OIG found the Central Bus Depot's shops were following proper de-fueling procedures and none of the MDT employees interviewed reported any safety violations or concerns. No additional information has been discovered to substantiate the allegations.

BACKGROUND

The OIG has been engaged in various monitoring activities relating to the procurement, acquisition, and operations of the County's CNG bus fleet. Specifically, regarding safety concerns of the CNG buses, on November 13, 2019, the OIG issued its [Final Contract Oversight Report titled *Review of Safety Concerns and the County's Procurement of Compressed Natural Gas Buses for the Department of Transportation and Public Works, IG 19-0015-O*](#). While the report debunked claims that the County's CNG buses were not safe, the OIG made specific safety-related recommendations to DTPW. The OIG requested and received a status report from DTPW demonstrating its actual implementation of the recommendations. DTPW's actions included significant enhancements to its natural gas cylinder inspection procedures and its process of documenting the inspections. Following the report and implementation of the recommendations, the OIG has continued to engage and work with DTPW to identify and correct safety issues. The OIG's previous monitoring activities informed this preliminary inquiry.

OIG PRELIMINARY INQUIRY

The OIG inquiry reviewed the alleged safety violations specifically focused on the buses operating under CNG fuel. The complaint alleged violations of safety protocols creating unsafe conditions by shop employees and the circumvention of de-fueling procedures by administrative personnel at Central Bus Depot to minimize the downtime on the buses. It was alleged that employees were being ordered by the administration to violate protocols. The complainant identified a specific CNG bus (B18111), and stated the bus was currently under repair in the body shop and the safety procedures had been violated.⁵

On November 25, 2024, the OIG interviewed several Central Bus Depot employees from the maintenance shop. The technicians were selected at random without prior notice given to the shop employees or supervisors. Bradrick Jones (Maintenance Technician), Geovanny Leiva (Mechanic Technician), Luis Barroso (Mechanic Technician) and Julio Chanying (Second Shift Supervisor) provided the OIG with voluntary sworn statements. Mr. Barroso, Mr. Jones, Mr. Leiva and Mr. Chanying confirmed they have never witnessed any unsafe or dangerous conditions involving the CNG de-fueling process in the shop. The buses are properly de-fueled if any repairs or maintenance needs to be carried out on the CNG tanks.

⁴ Additionally, the OIG emailed the complainant, who had provided no other contact information, and requested that he contact the OIG to discuss the concerns. The complainant did not call the numbers provided but did reply to the email stating "[t]he reason I have not contacted you is that the violations are there and can be verified if a proper investigation is conducted."

⁵ The safety violations mentioned included performing welding and grinding work on or near the CNG fuel tanks without properly de-fueling the bus.

All individuals interviewed stated that only certified inspectors are allowed to work on the CNG tanks, and the inspectors must pass a yearly course to receive the certification. At no time have they been asked to circumvent or violate the de-fueling process to expedite the repair time. If they were asked or instructed to violate the de-fueling process they would report the matter to their respective superiors.

During the interviews, only one employee remembered a safety incident, which was immediately addressed. Mr. Barroso, remembered an incident involving a bus and the hydraulic lifts. Four hydraulic lifts are required to raise the buses while work is being performed; one lift is placed underneath the frame located near each of the wheels. These attachment points are designed to safely support the weight of the bus when elevated. On that occasion, the technician inadvertently used three lifts, causing the bus to tilt to one side. Another technician noticed and immediately stopped the lift. The matter was addressed with the mechanic and no other incident has occurred.

On November 26, 2024, the OIG interviewed more Central Bus Depot employees from the body shop. The body shop technicians were also selected at random without prior notice given. Keith Hamilton (Lead Worker/Bus Body Technician), Peter Cerda (Body/Mechanic Technician), Andre Clayton (Body Shop Supervisor) and Mario Sanchez (Central Bus Superintendent) agreed to provide the OIG with voluntary sworn statements. Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Cerda, Mr. Clayton, and Mr. Sanchez confirmed they have never observed any unsafe or dangerous situations involving repairs or de-fueling of the CNG buses. The buses are never drained inside the shop and if the CNG tanks require emptying prior to work being performed, they are emptied at the fuel island.

None of the witnesses interviewed had observed violations of the safety protocols. Every witness interviewed confirmed that only certified inspectors are allowed to work on the CNG tanks and prior to any welding or grinding work done, the tanks are completely drained. The employees were aware of the proper safety procedures in place should a gas leak be detected and knew who they had to report the information to. Both the maintenance shop and the body shop had detection sensors and extraction fans in place should a leak occur. All employees interviewed confirmed safety was the priority at the Central Bus Depot and no "short cuts" occurred.

The OIG asked Mr. Sanchez to conduct a search for the maintenance/repair history of CNG bus no. B18111. Mr. Sanchez reviewed the historical log and confirmed B18111 has never received damage to the CNG tanks. Mr. Sanchez provided the OIG with the most recent log records for B18111, which included a recent inspection of the CNG fuel tanks dated May 4, 2024, and a recent accident work order for a damaged front windshield dated November 18, 2024. Both work orders were provided to the OIG. Based on the work order history, B18111 had never needed to be de-fueled.

The OIG visited the bay where B18111 was being stored and visually observed the damage to the front of the bus. The shop personnel confirmed the CNG tanks had not been drained because repair work had not commenced. The witnesses advised the OIG that if the repairs required the tanks to be drained, the bus would be taken to the fuel island and properly emptied. The work order would reflect the tanks being drained and the information would be documented on the maintenance log. The observations noted

by the OIG during the two days of interviews and field observations did not support the complainant's allegations.

CONCLUSION AND CASE CLOSURE RECOMMENDATION

Based on the information and documentation reviewed by the OIG, the allegations that Central Bus Major Overhaul Body Shop personnel violated safety procedures, de-fueling protocols, and circumvented procedures to expedite repair time are unfounded. The allegation employees were ordered by the administration to violate the de-fueling procedures was also unfounded. No further investigation into this matter is warranted and it is recommended that this inquiry be closed.

SUBMITTED BY:

Missael Diaz

Special Agent

February 14, 2025

Date

INQUIRY CLOSURE APPROVALS:

Javier Garcia

Supervisor

February 14, 2025

Date

Hector R. Ortiz

Assistant IG for Investigations

February 14, 2025

Date

Marie Perikles

Deputy General Counsel

February 14, 2025

Date

Felix Jimenez

Inspector General

February 14, 2025

Date