



Memorandum



Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General
A State of Florida Commission on Law Enforcement Accredited Agency
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To: Jay Fink, Director
Department WASD

From: Felix Jimenez, Inspector General 

Date: June 4, 2026

Subject: OIG Report of Investigation – Employees Illegally Recycling WASD Scrap Metal, Ref. IG22-0017-I

Attached is the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG's) final Report of Investigation referenced above.

A draft report was provided to you and to Water & Sewer Department (WASD) employees Otto Sorey and Ronnie Hernandez for review and an opportunity to provide discretionary written responses. The OIG appreciates receiving WASD's response, attached to the report as Appendix A; no other responses were received.

The Report of Investigation contains four (4) recommendations, which you have indicated WASD is accepting. The OIG requests WASD provide us a status report in 90 days regarding the implementation of the recommendations and any other actions taken following the OIG's final report. We look forward to receiving your response on or before September 1, 2026. The response may be sent by email to felix.jimenez@miamidade.gov or otherwise by mail or delivery to the address listed above.

The OIG would like to thank WASD's staff for their cooperation and for the courtesies extended to the OIG during this investigation. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Attachment

cc: Otto Sorey (under separate cover)
Ronnie Hernandez (under separate cover)



MIAMI-DADE COUNTY OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL
REPORT OF INVESTIGATION
EMPLOYEES ILLEGALLY RECYCLING WASD SCRAP METAL
IG22-0017-I

I. INTRODUCTION & SYNOPSIS

In 2022, the Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated an investigation based on a complaint alleging that a Miami-Dade County Water and Sewer Department (WASD) employee illegally took scrap metal, which was generated during his WASD employment, and sold the stolen property to a private recycling company for cash. The investigation ultimately focused on six employees. The OIG conducted a joint criminal investigation with the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office (MDSO), and the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office (SAO).

The investigation substantiated that WASD employees were selling WASD scrap metal to secondary metal recyclers for their personal benefit. Four employees were arrested on various fraud-related charges.¹ Two other employees, Otto Sorey and Ronnie Alberto Hernandez, originally subjects of the criminal investigation, were not arrested or charged with any crime. This report, documenting the facts related to Mr. Sorey and Mr. Hernandez, is being issued following the conclusion in April 2026 of the criminal cases. Although neither was criminally charged, the OIG investigation substantiated that Mr. Sorey and Mr. Hernandez sold WASD property for their personal benefit.

The OIG investigation found Mr. Sorey conducted approximately 22 separate recycling transactions during the period of review and obtained \$3,987.87. Mr. Sorey admitted that approximately 2% of those transactions, or approximately \$79.75, was derived from the sale of WASD scrap metal. Mr. Sorey claimed that the balance of the items recycled (98%), despite being nearly identical to other items recycled, was generated from his private plumbing business. Mr. Sorey has not requested and has affirmatively denied outside employment. Moreover, he has not reported outside employment income to WASD.² Mr. Hernandez, currently a supervisor, conducted one transaction during the period of review and obtained \$151.70. Mr. Hernandez fully cooperated and freely admitted the items he sold for recycling were generated from his work at WASD.

The OIG investigation highlights that WASD should strengthen the department's communications to its employees of WASD policies and procedures and control of WASD resources. The OIG has recommendations for WASD to consider, with the goal of ensuring WASD property is safeguarded and that WASD is able to fully recover funds from the proper recycling of its scrap metal.

¹ The criminal cases resulting from this investigation are: *State v. Juan Carlos De Los Santos*, F25-20720, *State v. Joel Saud*, F25-20721, *State v. Richard Tamarez*, F25-20722, *State v. Barbaro Leonel Gutierrez*, M26-002318.

² As this investigation was an ongoing criminal investigation no referral was made to the Miami-Dade Commission on Ethics and Public Trust. Although the criminal cases have now concluded, the statute of limitations on any ethics violations have expired.

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II. OIG JURISDICTIONAL AUTHORITY

In accordance with Section 2-1076 of the Code of Miami-Dade County, the Inspector General has the authority to make investigations of County affairs; audit, inspect, and review past, present and proposed County and Public Health Trust programs, accounts, records, contracts, and transactions; conduct reviews, audits, inspections, and investigations of County and Public Health Trust departments, offices, agencies, and boards; and require reports from County and Public Health Trust officials and employees, including the Mayor, regarding any matter within the jurisdiction of the Inspector General.

III. GOVERNING AUTHORITIES

Fla. Stat. Chapter 538: Secondhand Dealers and Secondary Metals Recyclers

Fla. Stat. 538.18(11) defines a secondary metals recycler, in part, as:

*...any person who is engaged, from a fixed location, in the business of **purchase transactions** or gathering or obtaining ferrous or nonferrous metals that have served their original economic purpose... [Emphasis added]*

Miami-Dade County Administrative Order (AO) 8-4: Scrap Metal Recovery

All scrap, ferrous and non-ferrous metal, generated during County business is County property that must be disposed of for the benefit of Dade County. Departments will develop internal procedures to accumulate scrap metal and will notify the Property Control Office by transmittal of a Property Action Form once sufficient quantities are available for on-site sale or movement to the Hialeah disposal facility.³

IV. CASE INITIATION AND INVESTIGATIVE METHODOLOGY

This investigation was initiated based on a confidential complaint alleging a WASD employee was removing copper fittings, scrap-metal and/or other metal materials from WASD and selling it at a scrap yard.

The investigation was conducted as a criminal investigation in conjunction with the SAO's Public Corruption Unit and MDSO. In conducting this investigation, the OIG interviewed various officials at WASD to determine WASD's policies and procedures related to scrap metal recycling. The OIG obtained and reviewed employee files and other documents. Along with MDSO, the OIG reviewed recycling transactions through a database, LeadsOnline, which is maintained pursuant to state law. The OIG obtained transaction

³ Ferrous is defined as of, relating to, or containing iron. Non-ferrous is defined as not containing, including, or relating to iron. Source: Merriam-Webster dictionary.

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records from various recycling companies related to WASD employees, which included photos of the recycling customers and items offered for recycling. The documents also included State mandated documents attesting to ownership of the recycled material and payment receipts. The OIG conducted numerous sworn interviews of WASD employees, including the subjects of the investigation.

This investigation was conducted in accordance with the *Principles and Standards for Offices of Inspector General* as promulgated by the Association of Inspectors General.

V. INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

Background

WASD maintains more than 8,500 miles of underground water lines, as well as approximately 4,100 miles of sewer lines. As a result of its continuous maintenance of County water and sewer systems, scrap metal is generated. The scrap metal is the County's property and WASD has instituted rules for the proper disposal of scrap metal. The scrap is to be collected on site and returned to a WASD facility.

Juan M. Pelay, Chief, WASD Meter Division, explained WASD's process regarding recyclable materials, such as copper fittings, scrap-metal, and other types of recyclables. Mr. Pelay advised the OIG that any scrap material from the field is segregated by type. Valuable recyclables, like bronze and copper, are placed in a bin, while iron pipes and other old material are placed in a separate pile. Brass and copper are segregated and placed in large drums. The drums are eventually taken to a designated WASD facility to be sold at auction.

WASD separates the material and periodically auctions the scrap metals in bulk, thereby recouping hundreds of thousands of dollars. Mr. Pelay stated that although it depends on the volume and the price of the commodity at the time, WASD can make as much as \$100,000 to \$300,000 for a truck full of scrap water meters. WASD scrap metal sales are managed through the County's People and Internal Operations Department (PIOD). The OIG met with PIOD's Surplus Property Supervisor Isauro Alba to request WASD's bidding and online sales data between 2022 and 2025. Mr. Alba informed the OIG that WASD scrap metal sales managed through PIOD had generated over \$260,000 for the time reviewed.

Florida scrap metal recycling businesses are required to input transaction details into a database called LeadsOnline. Recycling centers photograph the scrap metal brought into a recycling center and are required to have the individual offering the scrap metal attest to the scrap metals' ownership with his/her signature. In addition to the photographs of the scrap metal, a photograph of the person is taken or verified to be on file. Some

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recycling facilities also take a thumbprint and retain that image in their records. The recycling center must retain these records for a legally mandated period.

The OIG investigation identified, through the LeadsOnline database, six WASD employees taking scrap metal to recycling centers. The evidence relating to the transactions varies with each employee. Some employees, including supervisors, went only once or a few times during the period reviewed. Some employees went on a habitual basis. One employee went over 100 times to recycle WASD scrap metal. There is no evidence that the employees colluded with each other in their scheme. Instead, each employee appears to have acted independently. Four of the six employees were charged with theft of WASD property and with violating Section 538.23 Florida Statutes, which designates it as a felony to knowingly give false verification of ownership to a secondary metals recycler when receiving money in exchange for regulated metals.

In the criminal investigation Joel Saud, a pipefitter supervisor, was charged with conducting 101 illegal recycling transactions while working as a senior meter technician from 2019 through 2023 and receiving a total of \$17,433.38 in proceeds belonging to WASD. Juan Carlos De Los Santos, a pipefitter, was charged with conducting 15 illegal recycling transactions between 2020 and 2022 and receiving a total of \$2,336.12 in proceeds belonging to WASD. Richard Tamarez, a pipefitter, was charged with conducting 8 illegal recycling transactions between 2018 and 2022 and receiving a total of \$4,336.86 in proceeds belonging to WASD. Barbaro L. Gutierrez, a pipefitter supervisor, was charged with conducting one illegal recycling transaction in 2022 and receiving a total of \$318.00 in proceeds belonging to WASD. Each of the four charged criminally have entered into pleas and agreed to pay restitution to the County, costs of investigation to the OIG, and costs of prosecution to the State of Florida.

This report addresses two employees, Messrs. Sorey and Hernandez, who were not charged by the SAO.

Finding 1: Mr. Sorey Sold WASD Scrap to a Metal Recycler and Engaged in Unsanctioned Outside Employment

During this investigation, WASD Security Supervisor Luis Robainas⁴ provided the OIG with over 50 names of WASD employees assigned to the WASD Distribution Facility, who otherwise had access to areas of scrap metal. The OIG with the assistance of MDSO's Internal Affairs Bureau,⁵ queried LeadsOnline, which maintains transactions from reporting metal recycling centers.

⁴ Mr. Robainas has since retired from the County.

⁵ At the time the investigation was initiated it was the Professional Compliance Bureau of the Miami-Dade Police Department.

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The recycling center is required by law to enter information such as the date and time of the transaction, assign a discrete ticket number to the transaction, provide a brief description of scrap items and quantities purchased, and maintain the name of the owner selling the items. Upon reviewing the WASD employees with access to scrap metal against the information obtained through LeadsOnline, the OIG was able to identify the six individuals investigated. Mr. Sorey was one of those individuals.

Mr. Sorey is a county employee who began his career with WASD in December 2018 as a WASD Pipefitter. As a WASD Pipefitter, Mr. Sorey is responsible for the installation, repair, and maintenance of all lines of the County water distribution system.

The OIG learned that Mr. Sorey visited a recycling center, Transmetal Trading, on the following occasions between February 2018 and October 2021 to dispose of various types of metals:

Table 1: Transactions Identified as Mr. Sorey's

#	Date /Time	Ticket #	Description	Amount
1	10/29/2021 (2:33 PM)	4431938	COPPER #2 COPPER #2 and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$90.80
2	10/22/2021 (11:28 AM)	4423166	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN and COPPER #2 COPPER #2	\$170.80
3	10/15/2021 (10:34 AM)	4414283	COPPER #2 COPPER #2 and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$101.10
4	10/5/2021 (2:45 PM)	4401690	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN and COPPER #2 COPPER #2	\$185.60
5	8/25/2021 (3:45 PM)	4353185	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN and COPPER #1 COPPER #1	\$286.60
6	7/19/2021 (3:23 PM)	4308197	COPPER #2 COPPER #2 and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$125.85
7	5/27/2021 (12:28 PM)	4250312	COPPER #2 COPPER #2 and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$184.25
8	5/6/2021 (12:11 PM)	4225702	COPPER #2, COPPER #1, LEAD, WHEEL WEIGHT, and SHOTS	\$170.10
9	4/29/2021 (2:06 PM)	4218359	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$99.00
10	4/9/2021 (8:37 AM)	4194364	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN, COPPER #1, and COPPER #2	\$231.55
11	3/29/2021 (2:36 PM)	4182341	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN, COPPER #2, and COPPER #1	\$463.75
12	3/22/2021 (3:24 PM)	4174023	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$118.80
13	2/15/2021 (11:31 AM)	4135419	COPPER #2, YELLOW BRASS CLEAN, and COPPER #1	\$190.10
14	12/11/2020 (8:18 AM)	4064113	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN, COPPER B&S (BRITE & SHINE), and COPPER #2	\$445.65
15	9/2/2020 (2:14 PM)	3954313	COPPER #2, and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$102.00
16	8/10/2020 (2:59 PM)	3929500	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN and COPPER #2	\$263.05
17	6/30/2020 (2:48 PM)	3890934	COPPER #2, IRON #2 (MIX METAL, LIGHT METAL), COPPER ALUMINUM RADIATOR, and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$216.38
18	7/14/2018 (10:51 AM)	3017654	COPPER #2 and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$235.69
19	4/20/2018 (3:16 PM)	2898537	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$54.60
20	3/31/2018 (9:29 AM)	2871033	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$50.40

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#	Date /Time	Ticket #	Description	Amount
21	3/10/2018 (12:46 PM)	2843585	COPPER #2 and YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$95.40
22	2/2/2018 (11:14 AM)	2796568	YELLOW BRASS CLEAN	\$106.40

The total amount obtained by Mr. Sorey during the above timeframe is \$3,987.87. The OIG checked with the State of Florida Department of Revenue General Tax Administration Specialties Unit and verified that the recycling company used by Mr. Sorey, Transmetal Trading, is a registered secondary metals recycler with the State of Florida. The OIG also verified that the scrap metal which was sold by Mr. Sorey, as described above, met the definition of regulated metals property, pursuant to Fla. Stat. 538.18(6).⁶

Transmetal Trading did not provide written documentation that Mr. Sorey affirmatively stated he was the owner or otherwise authorized to sell the scrap.⁷ However, Mr. Sorey admitted to the OIG that approximately 2% of that amount was WASD scrap metal; 2% of the total amount equals \$79.75.

Recycling Center Records: Transmetal Trading

Pursuant to a subpoena, Transmetal Trading provided records concerning transactions between Transmetal Trading and Mr. Sorey. The records provided corroborate the above-mentioned transactions confirming that Mr. Sorey visited Transmetal on the dates and times listed in Table 1, confirming Mr. Sorey disposed of the scrap metal described above, that he received a total of \$3,987.87. In addition, the Transmetal Trading records contained a photograph of the seller, which is a photograph of Mr. Sorey. As detailed below, Mr. Sorey admitted to and identified himself as the person conducting the transactions.

WASD Policy and Supervision of Scrap Metal Removal

WASD requires that employees acknowledge and sign a form specifying that the removal of WASD property is prohibited. On 11/2/2018, Mr. Sorey acknowledged in writing that he read and understood the WASD Policy regarding the use or removal of County property for uses other than County business. This form is maintained in his WASD Human Resources file. Specifically, the form states that “no Department employee is authorized to remove any publicly owned property from Department premises....” Mr. Sorey signed the form, see Figure 1 below, acknowledging that he understood that non-compliance could result in disciplinary action and/or criminal charges.

⁶

⁷ The SAO could not prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Mr. Sorey violated Fla. Chapter 538 crimes, which require a false claim of ownership of recycled regulated metals.

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Figure 1: Mr. Sorey's Acknowledgement Form

REMOVAL OF
MIAMI-DADE WATER & SEWER DEPARTMENT
PROPERTY

Based upon the Personnel Rules, Chapter 7, Section 7, no Department employee is authorized to remove any publicly-owned property from Department premises and move it to his own residence or private property location for any reason not related to official business. The single exception to this is the officially authorized use of an assigned Department vehicle. Any violations will result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from Miami Dade County employment.

Each employee, including supervisors, should be governed accordingly. In addition to disciplinary action, anyone in violation of the above order may be subject to criminal charges by the State Attorney's Office.

I have read and understood the Policy outlined above. I further understand that non-compliance may result in disciplinary action and/or be subject to criminal charges by the State Attorney's Office.

DTIO SOREY
Print Name

[Redacted]
Social Security #

[Signature]
Signature

11/02/18
Date

Statement of Mr. Melvin Mora

On Tuesday, January 16, 2024, WASD supervisor Melvin Mora, gave a sworn statement to the OIG. Mr. Mora has been a WASD employee since 1981, and a pipefitter supervisor for approximately thirty-two years. His position entails, among other things, installing water service for homes. Mr. Sorey was among the WASD employees who Mr. Mora supervises. Mr. Mora indicated that Mr. Sorey had worked with him a lot in the past two to three years. Mr. Mora stated that Mr. Sorey was often on his crew when he was on-call or on overtime. Otherwise, Mr. Sorey was supervised by another supervisor.

Mr. Mora confirmed that part of his supervisory responsibilities require that he inform his subordinates of WASD's Standard Operating Procedures and Policies. Mr. Mora established that he had personally instructed his subordinates what they are required to do with metal fittings, meters, valves, pipes, or parts generated during WASD business, and the repercussions should they not follow policy.

Mr. Mora stated that scrap metal and scrap copper generated during WASD business is considered County property. He instructs his employees to take all metal that comes out of the ground or is scrap and put it back in the truck. It is then added to the scrap pile

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when they return to the yard. He tells his employees that taking scrap metal is stealing and that they can be fired for it.

Statement of Mr. Sorey

Mr. Sorey gave a voluntary sworn statement to the OIG. Mr. Sorey admitted he was familiar with Miami-Dade County AO 8-4. The AO states:

All scrap, ferrous and non-ferrous metal, generated during the course of County business is County property and must be disposed of for the benefit of the County. Departments will develop internal procedures to accumulate scrap metals and will notify the Property Control Office, by transmittal of a Property Action Form, when sufficient quantities are available for on-site sale or movement to the Hialeah Disposal Facility.

Mr. Sorey explained that he understood that they were required to turn in scrap material. He acknowledged that “they [WASD] said nobody takes scraps...” He stated that during the course of a job he would throw scrap metal in his truck or in his supervisor’s truck.

He was asked if during his employment with WASD, he had received money from Transmetal Trading in exchange for any scrap metal, valves, parts, that he obtained during County business. Mr. Sorey replied, “probably side work, that type stuff, but no -- not County, though.”

The OIG reviewed with Mr. Sorey the payment receipts and supporting evidence of the 22 occasions that he visited Transmetal Trading between February 2018 and October 2021 to dispose of the various types of metals. Mr. Sorey confirmed that he in fact had visited Transmetal Trading on the dates in question and had received money in exchange for the metals described on the receipts and depicted in the supporting photographs.

The OIG inquired whether Mr. Sorey engaged in any outside employment. He stated, “No. I do my own little side stuff every now and then, but outside of that, no.” Mr. Sorey explained that he did “lawn maintenance, general fix -- you know, around the house type stuff, nothing major.” He also admitted to doing some minor plumbing work every now and then, specifically, kitchen and bathroom work such as replacing faucets.

Outside employment activities for full-time County employees are governed by Section 2-11 of the Code of Miami-Dade County, AO 7-1, and Miami-Dade County Procedures. In brief, these sections require prior approval in writing by the employee’s department director before engaging in outside employment. The approval must also be renewed on an annual basis. Copies of all Requests for Outside Employment forms are maintained by the PIOD’s Human Resources Division. The employees’ department also maintains

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appropriate records regarding outside employment requests. Conflicting employment which would impair an employee's independence of judgment in the performance of the employee's duties is prohibited. Employees engaging in outside employment must also file an annual financial disclosure statement. County employees not engaging in outside employment are required to annually declare they have no outside employment.

Mr. Sorey was shown his Outside Employment Declarations for calendar years 2019 through 2022, see Figures 2 to 5 below. Mr. Sorey confirmed that he had completed the Declarations online and had indicated that he was not engaged in any type of outside employment during those calendar years. Mr. Sorey never disclosed the source of any outside employment income to the County, as required.

Figure 2 – Excerpt of Mr. Sorey's 2019 Outside Employment Declaration

I, OTTO SOREY, a Miami-Dade County employee of Water and Sewer, certify that (CHECK ONE):

☒ I am NOT engaged in any type of Outside Employment

I am NOT engaged in any type of outside employment nor do I receive any gratuities or any type of payment from any person, firm, corporation, or entity other than Miami-Dade County (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I am NOT self-employed (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I do NOT own three (3) or more rental units.

☐ I AM currently engaged in / requesting Outside Employment

I AM currently engaged in / requesting outside employment, self-employed, and/or own three (3) or more rental units. I understand that to continue my outside employment, I must immediately apply for approval from the Department Director. I also understand that I (if a full-time employee) must report outside employment earnings to the Miami-Dade Elections Department by July 1st of each year.

I attest that the above information is true and correct and understand that failure to strictly comply with the outside employment policy of and/or misrepresentation of any information shall result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Employee Name: OTTO SOREY
Employee ID: 00322422
Position Title: W&S PIPEFITTER
Submitted Date: 05/15/2019
Department: Water and Sewer

Figure 3 – Excerpt of Mr. Sorey's 2020 Outside Employment Declaration

I, OTTO SOREY, a Miami-Dade County employee of Water and Sewer, certify that (CHECK ONE):

☒ I am NOT engaged in any type of Outside Employment

I am NOT engaged in any type of outside employment nor do I receive any gratuities or any type of payment from any person, firm, corporation, or entity other than Miami-Dade County (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I am NOT self-employed (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I do NOT own three (3) or more rental units.

☐ I AM currently engaged in / requesting Outside Employment

I AM currently engaged in / requesting outside employment, self-employed, and/or own three (3) or more rental units. I understand that to continue my outside employment, I must immediately apply for approval from the Department Director. I also understand that I (if a full-time employee) must report outside employment earnings to the Miami-Dade Elections Department by July 1st of each year.

I attest that the above information is true and correct and understand that failure to strictly comply with the outside employment policy of and/or misrepresentation of any information shall result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Employee Name: OTTO SOREY
Employee ID: 00322422
Position Title: W & S Pipefitter
Submitted Date: 02/05/2020
Department: Water and Sewer

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Figure 4 – Excerpt of Mr. Sorey's 2021 Outside Employment Declaration

I, OTTO SOREY, a Miami-Dade County employee of Water and Sewer, certify that (CHECK ONE):

☒ I am NOT engaged in any type of Outside Employment

I am NOT engaged in any type of outside employment nor do I receive any gratuities or any type of payment from any person, firm corporation, or entity other than Miami-Dade County (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I am NOT self-employed (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I do NOT own three (3) or more rental units.

☐ I AM currently engaged in / requesting Outside Employment

I AM currently engaged in / requesting outside employment, self-employed, and/or own three (3) or more rental units. I understand that to continue my outside employment, I must immediately apply for approval from the Department Director. I also understand that I (if a full-time employee) must report outside employment earnings to the Miami-Dade Elections Department by July 1st of each year.

I attest that the above information is true and correct and understand that failure to strictly comply with the outside employment policy of and/or misrepresentation of any information shall result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Employee Name: OTTO SOREY
Employee ID: 00322422
Position Title: W & S Pipefitter
Submitted Date: 02/02/2021
Department: Water and Sewer

Figure 5 – Excerpt of Mr. Sorey's 2022 Outside Employment Declaration

I, OTTO SOREY, a Miami-Dade County employee of Water and Sewer, certify that (CHECK ONE):

☒ I am NOT engaged in any type of Outside Employment

I am NOT engaged in any type of outside employment nor do I receive any gratuities or any type of payment from any person, firm corporation, or entity other than Miami-Dade County (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I am NOT self-employed (regardless of receipt of compensation or other consideration). I do NOT own three (3) or more rental units.

☐ I AM currently engaged in / requesting Outside Employment

I AM currently engaged in / requesting outside employment, self-employed, and/or own three (3) or more rental units. I understand that to continue my outside employment, I must immediately apply for approval from the Department Director. I also understand that I (if a full-time employee) must report outside employment earnings to the Miami-Dade Elections Department by July 1st of each year.

I attest that the above information is true and correct and understand that failure to strictly comply with the outside employment policy of and/or misrepresentation of any information shall result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Employee Name: OTTO SOREY
Employee ID: 00322422
Position Title: W & S Pipefitter
Submitted Date: 03/29/2022
Department: Water and Sewer

According to Mr. Sorey, for the most part, the metal that he sold at Transmetal Trading came from “doing work, side jobs.” Although he had initially denied selling scrap from his County job, Mr. Sorey admitted that “probably, like, 2 percent” came from the County.

As previously noted, 2% of the funds obtained by Mr. Sorey from the recycling facility totals \$79.75. The remaining amount of scrap he recycled, despite being nearly identical to other items recycled, was according to Mr. Sorey generated from his private side business. Figure 6 below depicts some of the scrap metal sold by Mr. Sorey, specifically the transaction shown is listed above in Table 1, #14. During his statement, Mr. Sorey acknowledged that the amount of money he made from recycling metals supposedly generated from his outside employment (\$3,987.87) was just a small fraction of the money he earned from his customers for his plumbing work.

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Figure 6 – Excerpt of Transmetal Trading documents showing scrap being weighed

Ticket #	: 4064113
Ticket Date	: 12/11/2020 8:18:39 AM
Buyer	: Elias Arita
Customer	: OTTO RHASHAD SOREY

Yellow Brass Clean	Gross Photo Gross:165.0000 Tara:0.0000 Net:165.0000 2020-12-11 13:55:00 
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Finding 2: Mr. Hernandez Sold WASD Scrap to a Metal Recycler

A query conducted through LeadsOnline showed that on November 11, 2020, at 10:56 a.m., Mr. Hernandez visited Bob's Recycling Center, and he received \$151.70 in exchange for items described as "Unclean Brass, #2 Copper, and Brass." Information obtained via LeadsOnline was independently corroborated with the records from the recycling center.

Recycling Center Records: Bob's Recycling Center

Bob's Recycling Center records obtained pursuant to subpoena independently corroborated the above-mentioned LeadsOnline transaction by Mr. Hernandez. According to Bob's Recycling Center's records, on or about Wednesday, November 11, 2020, Mr. Hernandez visited the recycler, located at 10690 Southwest 184 Terrace, Cutler Ridge, Florida 33157, and he received \$151.70 in exchange for an item described as "Unclean Brass, #2 Copper, and Brass."

The records provided for this transaction include: a receipt documenting scrap metal received, monies paid in exchange, an image of a thumb print, photos of the scrap metal purchased, photos of the person selling the scrap metal, and an acknowledgment form wherein the seller certifies that:

I am the rightful owner of, or entitled to sell the regulated metals property being sold. [Emphasis added]

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Under this statement Mr. Hernandez placed his signature adopting this statement as true.

The recycling center documents contain surveillance photos of the transaction, including photos of Mr. Hernandez selling the scrap metal.

The OIG checked with the State of Florida Department of Revenue General Tax Administration Specialties Unit and verified that Bobs Recycling Center is a registered secondary metals recycler with the State of Florida. Moreover, the OIG verified that the scrap metal sold by Mr. Hernandez met the definition of regulated metals property, pursuant to Fla. Stat. 538.18(6).

WASD Policy - Scrap Metal Removal

The OIG requested from WASD a copy of Mr. Hernandez's Removal Acknowledgment Form, acknowledging WASD and county policy regarding the removal of county property. WASD Human Resources searched their files for Mr. Hernandez's Removal Acknowledgment Form but was unable to locate a signed Removal Acknowledgment Form.

Statement of Mr. Hernandez

Mr. Hernandez provided the OIG a voluntary sworn statement. Mr. Hernandez is a County employee who began his career with WASD in August 2016 as a WASD Maintenance Repairer. In 2019, Mr. Hernandez was promoted to the position of pipefitter. Mr. Hernandez conducted his fraudulent transaction while serving in this position. In approximately March 2021, Mr. Hernandez was promoted to Pipefitter Supervisor. As a Pipefitter Supervisor, Mr. Hernandez is currently responsible for supervising a group of workers in the installation and maintenance of all lines of the County water distribution system.

At the time of his sworn statement to the OIG, Mr. Hernandez was a supervisor. The OIG discussed AO 8-4 with Mr. Hernandez and WASD internal procedures for the proper disposal of metals, fittings, and valves generated during WASD business. Mr. Hernandez said he was aware of AO 8-4 but had never read the AO. Specifically, he stated he heard about it from WASD Distribution Supervisor Jose Machado. Mr. Hernandez stated:

....When I first started, I was a maintenance repairman and he [Jose Machado] told me, whatever scraps you got, always leave it on the supervisor's truck and they'll take care of it. That's pretty much it, or, honestly, sometimes pipes, or whatever it is, if it's too big, we just leave it in the ground, we don't want to deal with it.

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During the course of the investigation, in addition to Mr. Hernandez, 5 other supervisors testified under oath that it was their common practice to leave scrap in the ground and bury it instead of retrieving it for recycling. One supervisor stated that the scrap “goes to the trash.” Mr. Sorey and Mr. Tamarez, one of the employees criminally charged, also stated that scrap would be left in the ground.

Mr. Hernandez was asked about WASD procedures for disposal of scrap metal and Mr. Hernandez said that it is supposed to be taken to BlackPoint.⁸ Mr. Hernandez was specifically asked if he was allowed to take scrap and sell it and he said no because it is County property.

Mr. Hernandez was asked what he would do as a supervisor if he saw one of his employees taking scrap from a WASD worksite and what his protocol would be if he found out an employee sold WASD scrap. Mr. Hernandez responded:

As a supervisor, first of all, I'm human, so, try to tell them, hey, listen, don't do it. This is your last chance. I'm not going to get involved in it, but I'm going to let you know if it becomes an issue where you keep doing this, I'm going to have to report it.

Mr. Hernandez agreed that an employee could lose their job or be arrested for taking and selling scrap belonging to WASD.

The OIG showed Mr. Hernandez a receipt from Bob's Recycling Center, titled LeadsOnline Ticket, dated November 11, 2020, 10:56 a.m. Mr. Hernandez confirmed that the information contained in the LeadsOnline Ticket was correct, including the \$151.70 he received from Bob's Recycling Center in exchange for the “Unclean Brass, #2 Copper and Brass.” Mr. Hernandez acknowledged that he signed attesting that he was the rightful owner of the metals that he sold to Bob's Recycling Center on the date of the transaction.

Mr. Hernandez stated that the scrap metal he sold to Bob's Recycling Center on November 11, 2020, was generated during his WASD employment. According to Mr. Hernandez, this was a one-time occurrence. Mr. Hernandez explained that he had money issues due to his ailing wife who was suffering serious medical issues.

VI. ISSUANCE OF DRAFT REPORT FOR REVIEW AND COMMENT

This report, as a draft, was provided to WASD'S Director, Mr. Sorey, and Mr. Hernandez, for their individual review and submission of discretionary written responses. The OIG received a response from WASD, attached as Appendix A; no other responses were

⁸ BlackPoint is a reference to WASD's South District Wastewater Treatment Plant. The plant is adjacent to the BlackPoint Marina and is commonly referred to as BlackPoint.

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received. WASD accepted the OIG's recommendations below, and is taking disciplinary action against the employees.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The OIG investigation found that WASD employees Mr. Sorey and Mr. Hernandez took WASD scrap metal and recycled it for their own personal benefit. The investigation also found that Mr. Sorey—by his own admission—was engaged in outside employment, despite having affirmatively denied it on his previous annual disclosures. Further, Mr. Sorey never disclosed the source of any outside employment income to the County, as required.

The investigation highlights that WASD should strengthen the department's communications to its employees about WASD policies and procedures and its control of WASD resources. In total, based on the theft by the four individuals criminally charged and the two employees in this report, the OIG identified a loss to WASD of \$24,655.81. Not quantifiable is the loss of material left behind in the ground because as reported to the OIG "...we just leave it in the ground, we don't want to deal with it." Given that auction records indicate WASD generated over \$260,000 between 2022 and 2025, and WASD's Chief of Water Meter Division noted that WASD can recover hundreds of thousands of dollars from the sale of scrap water meters, WASD should ensure that scrap material is accounted for and not left behind.

WASD's process in requiring that employees sign a general form acknowledging they cannot take County property for their own use is a good first step in safeguarding WASD resources. However, given that the scrap metal is fungible, difficult to track, and located beyond WASD facilities, the task of ensuring that WASD can maintain custody and control of the scrap metal and receive funds from recycling these materials requires further measures. To strengthen the existing WASD policies, the OIG provided the following recommendations, which WASD has indicated in its response it is accepting:

1- WASD should create a policy specifically for scrap material recovery.

This policy should address specifically how to handle scrap metal in the field and once returned to the workplace. The guidelines should clearly state that scrap metal should not be "buried" or "left in the ground" (a practice reported by WASD employees to the OIG). Exceptions requiring that scrap be left in the ground should be clearly delineated and include who is authorized to make a determination that an exception applies. The policy should state what type of metals should be collected for recycling and what to do with the metals once collected.

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2- The WASD property acknowledgement form should specify the prohibition on taking of scrap metals and materials.

The WASD acknowledgment form should be revised, or a separate acknowledgment form created, to specify the prohibition on taking scrap metal and materials. Whichever approach is used, the form should clearly state that scrap materials and metals are to be collected and turned into designated sites. Moreover, the form should clearly state that taking, selling, and disposing of such property is forbidden, and subjects employees to criminal penalties and discipline, including termination; the OIG suggests an acknowledgment such as:

I understand that any scrap metal generated from the installation or replacement of water meters or scrap metal generated from any assignment I am given by my supervisor is the Property of Miami-Dade County and it must be collected and returned to WASD. I understand that I cannot sell the scrap metal to a local metal recycler or anyone else. I understand that I cannot give scrap metal to a third person to sell on my behalf. I understand that doing any of these things violates WASD policy and that I could be disciplined, including being terminated and criminally prosecuted for violating Florida statutes including theft, dealing in stolen property and providing false verification to a secondary metal recycler.

The form should be mandatory for all employees, kept in their personnel file, and supervisory personnel should be required to sign a new form upon promotion.

3- WASD should increase the number of recycling bins to ensure all work sites have appropriate receptacles.

All worksites should have appropriate receptacles for employees to deposit scrap upon completion of shifts. The designated recycling bins should be properly marked and easily accessible. A copy of WASD's Scrap Materials Recovery Policy should be conspicuously posted on or near the designated collection bins.

4- WASD should institute periodic and continuous training on how to handle scrap materials and metals and other WASD equipment and property.

This training should include guidance on how to handle scrap metals and material in the field and how and where to take the material once collected. It should also include guidance on what to do with the material upon return to WASD property. Training logs and sign-in sheets should be maintained to document the date of the training, identify the name of person conducting the class, document the general content of the training, and the names of employees in attendance.
