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<p>moderator</p> <p>Registered: 12/17/06 Posts: 39</p>	<p>07/02/09 at 04:22 PM</p> <p>By STEPHEN LOSEY May 25, 2009</p> <p>Fifty-three federal and contractor investigators falsified security clearance background investigations since 2005, according to data obtained by <i>Federal Times</i>.</p> <p>All of them have either been fired or left their jobs, and six were prosecuted within the last year for criminal misconduct. And more prosecutions may be on the way, said Kathy Dillaman, associate director for the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Investigative Services Division.</p> <p>OPM declined to say how many background investigations may have been compromised by those 53 investigators. But the number could be significant. For the six investigators who were prosecuted, OPM had to conduct hundreds of interviews at a cost of a quarter-million dollars to reinvestigate people's backgrounds. The agency did not withdraw anybody's clearance after its reinvestigations, Dillaman said.</p> <p>The 53 investigators who falsified investigations represent less than 1 percent of the roughly 6,300 federal and contract investigators on staff. But because it presents a national security vulnerability, however statistically small, the problem is taken seriously: OPM has a zero-tolerance policy toward employees or contractors who falsify, or ghostwrite, interviews or record checks.</p> <p>OPM finds them by sending out follow-on questionnaires to people questioned by investigators to double check that they were, in fact, questioned properly.</p> <p>The prosecutions of the six former investigators all of whom were caught or pleaded guilty in the last 13 months were intended to send a very strong message, Dillaman said. People might be willing to lose their job, but very few will be willing to have a felony conviction and go to jail.</p>

Dillaman said she believes the problem is isolated and not indicative of a wider problem. But current and former investigators interviewed by *Federal Times* disagree, saying they suspect the problem stretches beyond what the numbers show. They say they're surprised OPM hasn't found more investigators falsifying their cases or cutting corners in other ways to cope with intense workloads and short deadlines.

Eight current and former security clearance investigators say they have been pressured to work faster and take on crushing workloads in recent years, as the government tried to eliminate a backlog that once topped 531,000 cases.

Investigators have eliminated that backlog, but they now are trying to meet congressionally mandated deadlines to speed up the security clearance process. The 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act requires agencies to issue at least 80 percent of initial security clearances within 120 days after receiving a completed application. This December, agencies must issue at least 90 percent of their initial security clearances within 60 days.

This job is a shredder, and agents are grist for the mill, said K.C. Smith, an OPM investigator in Austin, Texas, with 23 years of experience. There are people who are getting sick, under a lot of stress, their family life is suffering. They are just beat down. Investigators say it is common practice to spend nights, weekends and holidays writing up reports, and some don't report the overtime they work for fear it will be held against them in their performance evaluations.

Some say their superiors have made it clear that the priority is to close cases, and they say they have felt pressure to turn in even incomplete cases that lack crucial interviews or records if it will help them keep their numbers up. A recent Government Accountability Office report found that the Defense Department's security clearance process is plagued by such incomplete cases: 87 percent of the 3,500 initial top-secret security clearance cases Defense approved last year were missing at least one interview or important record.

OPM and one of its contractors, U.S. Investigative Services, acknowledge that their investigators are busy, but they said workloads aren't insurmountable.

There are certainly pressures to perform, Dillaman said. The taxpayers deserve that. But this isn't your job if you can't handle those pressures.

USIS said that it constantly reviews its employees caseloads to make sure they aren't overburdened.

It's in our best interest not to overload investigators, said USIS CEO Bill Mixon. We have sophisticated systems that allow us to monitor caseloads.

Quantity versus quality

But some former USIS investigators said the workloads burned them out.

I'd typically have eight to 10 open cases at a time with a lot of pressure to close as many in a week as possible, said one former USIS investigator, who asked not to be identified. I'm a very thorough guy, and I want to do it right the first time, and I never had a case reopened. But I was admonished for being too thorough and taking too long. They sent me to a remedial training course [on time management], and I felt very insulted.

He suspected some of his co-workers who were hitting their goals and clearing 15 to 30 cases a week were only conducting cursory interviews if at all.

They had two or three cases reopened every week, he said. When I looked at the numbers they produced and knowing the areas they were working, it was very doubtful they were conducting all the interviews they said or that they were conducting them thoroughly. At some point in the process, they were cutting a corner or two.

Another OPM investigator with more than two decades of experience said the deadlines and pressure to eliminate the backlog have hurt the quality of investigations and possibly caused some to ghostwrite.

We got rid of the backlog, but there will be a substantial price to be paid, he said. Investigations turned in since 2005 have, in many cases, not been worth the paper they're written on.

Some investigators told *Federal Times* the government needs to review the workloads its investigators handle, and hire more investigators to handle the cases. Others say mismanagement and poor allocation of resources is the problem.

Some investigators said OPM field managers sometimes make them drive an hour or two out of their way to interview a subject, when another investigator is already in the area and could easily handle the interview.

Only one investigator interviewed Steven Postle, the supervisory agent for the Tampa, Fla., field office felt there were no problems with the security clearance system or workloads.

OPM has done a pretty good job over the years, Postle said. Field offices hold cases until

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	<p>an agent can handle it, so the field office could potentially be behind, but it would never be on the agent's head.</p> <p><i>Tell us what you think. E-mail Stephen Losey.</i></p>
amgervacio Registered: 12/18/06 Posts: 11	<p><i>10/29/09 at 11:51 AM</i></p> <p>I wonder how many of these 53 were retired or former 1811.</p>
ENZO Registered: 10/05/07 Posts: 26	<p><i>10/30/09 at 04:11 PM</i></p> <p>I don't get it? What work load? I've been at it 8 years and barely get even a few cases a year, and I am with five companies? Ya ya location, location location. Really?</p>
rnesvick Registered: 11/03/07 Posts: 24	<p><i>10/31/09 at 05:34 PM</i></p> <p>In March 2006 when I went through the OPM/FISD Basic Agent school in Boyers, Steven Postle was an instructor who had never worked the field. Book learned as he was, how can he now be a Supervisory Agent? Amazing. How does Dillman keep her job?</p>