

Harassed Palo Verde whistle-blower is awarded \$50,000

By Kathleen Ingley
The Arizona Republic

An administrative judge has awarded \$50,000 to a whistle-blower at the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station, saying she was harassed for pointing out serious safety problems.

Electrical engineer Linda Mitchell suffered co-workers' hostility, the threat of firing, and the label of "witch" from the plant's quality-assurance director, U.S. Department of Labor Judge Rudolf L. Jensen said in the opinion, issued last Thursday.

Palo Verde and Arizona Public Service Co., which operates the plant, issued a statement Wednesday saying

they will appeal the decision.

"Since the issue involved was a personnel matter and remains in litigation, it is not appropriate for us to comment further at this time," the statement said.

In one incident that Jensen cited, a co-worker pointed to a busload of my used in fire-safety training and said, "That could happen to Linda if she doesn't get her act together."

Describing the corporate attitude toward Mitchell and the safety issues she raised, the judge wrote, "There is a cancer growing which if allowed to continue could become catastrophic."

He ordered APS and the seven-utility

consortium that owns Palo Verde to take steps to prevent further harassment and bias against Mitchell.

"I feel it was a victory for everyone that wants to have safe nuclear power plants," said Mitchell, who lives in Buckeye, just a few miles from the

generating station.

In her seven years at Palo Verde, Mitchell repeatedly has alerted the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to safety problems at the nuclear plant, the nation's largest, especially in the crucial emergency-lighting system.

The NRC has fined Palo Verde \$225,000 over the lighting problems.

Since filing the harassment complaint nearly two years ago, Mitchell said she has continued to suffer for her whistle-blowing and has filed three more complaints that are

scheduled for a hearing next month.

In May, the Department of Labor found that APS unfairly had downgraded Mitchell's annual review from "excellent" to "average" and ordered the company to upgrade the appraisal. APS is appealing that decision.

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Robbers posed as installers

Police need help finding two men who robbed a Paradise Valley woman's home June 5 after posing as cable-television installers.

A maid allowed the pair to enter the home while the owner was at work. Once inside, one of the men put a gun to her head and forced the maid into a bathroom. They then took a videocassette recorder and small safe from the home.

One suspect is described as Hispanic, about 5 feet 8 inches tall and thin, with a dark complexion and dark eyes. The other suspect is an Anglo who was wearing a T-shirt, jeans and a baseball cap.

The crime will be re-enacted during newscasts Thursday at 6 a.m., Friday at noon and Saturday at 5 a.m. on KPHX-TV (Channel 12).

2 fugitives sought

Police also need help in finding two men wanted on outstanding felony warrants.

Mark Leslie Horstman, 26, is the subject of a warrant charging him with violating probation on a felony theft sentence. He is described as Anglo, 5 feet 11 and 205 pounds. He has brown hair and hazel eyes.

Donnie Henry, 20, is the subject of an outstanding felony warrant charging him with violating probation on an aggravated-assault sentence.

Henry is described as black, 5 feet 7 and 175 pounds, with black hair and brown eyes. He is known by the alias "Black Black," and has "B.G.O." tattooed on his right bicep.

Henry should be considered dangerous.

Donnie Henry
Should be considered dangerous.

Mark Leslie Horstman
Is wanted for violating probation.

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