



Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of Inspector General

News Release

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VA Office of Inspector General Receives Project Excellence Awards

WASHINGTON – The VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) today was recognized by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE), receiving two team awards for Project Excellence and three individual awards.

VA OIG received the Project Excellence awards for the *Audit of the Seismic Safety of VA's Facilities* completed by the Office of Audits and Evaluations and *Investigation of a Contracting Officer's Technical Representative Bribery Scheme at the VAMC Palo Alto* by the Office of Investigations. In addition to these two awards, three OIG staff members received Project Excellence awards for their involvement working on projects with other Inspectors General.

“CIGIE’s Project Excellence awards recognize projects of unusual distinction, excellence, and innovative oversight in the Federal Government Inspector General community,” said Michael J. Missal, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General. “These awards recognize the OIG’s dedication and commitment to increasing efficiency and effectiveness in how VA delivers health care and benefits to our nation’s veterans.”

VA OIG staff received their awards at the 19th Annual Inspector General Community Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C., at the Ronald Reagan Building Amphitheater. The annual awards ceremony recognizes outstanding achievements throughout the Federal Inspector General community.

OIG staff receiving awards included investigators, auditors, physicians, and analysts. Highlights of the OIG’s awards include the following:

[*Audit of the Seismic Safety of VA Facilities*](#) exposed major seismic deficiencies within VA facilities. The audit resulted in a Presidential Executive Order ensuring veteran and employee safety in not only VA but also all Federal buildings with high-risk seismic activity. VA began a seismic safety program following the 1971 San Fernando earthquake in southern California. The program focuses on ensuring new VA construction projects are built in compliance with seismic design requirements, and it identifies and mitigates seismic risks in existing facilities. This OIG project reviewed whether VA facilities are prepared for major earthquakes. The OIG team found that VA did not effectively identify seismic risks for 15 of 97 critical and essential buildings located at 23 Veterans Health Administration facilities in areas

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that have a high or very high probability of experiencing a damaging earthquake. VA also had not mitigated structural seismic deficiencies discovered in 28 of the 97 critical and essential buildings. Similarly, VA had not mitigated nonstructural seismic deficiencies such as bracing ceilings and mechanical equipment in 65 of the 97 critical and essential buildings.

Team members:

VA OIG Office of Audits and Evaluations: Mario Carbone, Director; Theresa Cinciripini, Management Analyst; Clenes Duhon, Auditor; Michael Jacobs, Auditor; Jehri Lawson, Audit Manager; and Kristin Nichols, Management Analyst

Investigation of a Contracting Officer's Technical Representative Bribery Scheme at the VAMC Palo Alto led to successful public corruption prosecutions of four former VA employees, three contractors, and one subcontractor associated with construction contracts at several VA medical centers (VAMCs) in California. In 2011, VA OIG and the FBI began a probe into alleged corrupt contracting activities at the VAMCs in Palo Alto and Sacramento, CA. The multiyear investigation resulted in the conviction of seven individuals on bribery and other charges. As the investigation unfolded, OIG Office of Investigations discovered that multiple VA employees took bribes and accepted cash, trips, and other gifts in exchange for steering million-dollar contracts to particular contractors. The efforts of Special Agents (SA) Efferem Poynter and David Brown resulted in exposing the depth of corruption in the contracting processes of these VAMCs. Their hard work will hopefully deter other VA contracting officials and VA contractors from following this path. This investigation and CIGIE award represents a capstone event in SA Poynter's career, as he will soon retire from Federal service. Also, see DOJ news release [Federal Investigation Yields Multiple Convictions In Connection With Bribery Of Veterans Affairs Contracting Officer](#).

Team members:

VA OIG Office of Investigations: Efferem Poynter, Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation: David Brown, Special Agent

In addition to these two VA OIG CIGIE Project Excellence awards, three other VA OIG staff members received Project Excellence awards for their contributions in other Federal OIG projects. The VA OIG Office of Investigation's Resident Agent in Charge in our Kansas City office, Greg Billingsley, was recognized for his role in the U.S. General Services Administration's award for ***Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) Fraud Investigation Regarding Silver Star Construction***. Silver Star Construction and its owners fraudulently claimed SDVOSB status and received over \$8 million in Federal contracts they were not entitled to receive.

VA OIG Office of Healthcare Inspection's Dr. George Wesley and Dr. Thomas Wong were recognized as part of the Peace Corps' award for ***Peace Corps' Volunteer Healthcare Program Evaluation***. The team performed an evaluation of the Volunteer Healthcare Program and described gaps in medical emergency preparedness, including incomplete medical evacuation plans and noncompliance with the requirement to perform periodic medical emergency preparedness drills.

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The OIG conducts oversight of VA and its programs and operations, providing independent and objective reporting to the VA Secretary and the Congress for the purpose of preventing and detecting fraud and abuse, and bringing about positive change in the integrity, efficiency, and effectiveness of VA. To report potential criminal activity, fraud, waste, mismanagement, or other abuse, contact the [VA OIG Hotline](#) at yaoighotline@va.gov.

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