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If Veterans don't help Veterans, who will?

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Busted! - Feds Caught Shredding Veterans' Health Claims

April 19, 2016 / The Horn News

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) launched surprise raids of 10 Veterans Affairs Regional Offices (VARO) last summer after receiving a tip from a whistleblower. And what they found was disturbing.

According to the recently released report, the VA has been methodically destroying hundreds of veterans' benefits and claim documents at their offices in Atlanta, Chicago, Houston, New Orleans, **Philadelphia** and Reno.

And those actions "could result in loss of claims and medical evidence, incorrect decisions, and delays in claims processing," the OIG's report states. According to the report, the OIG found the VARO staff had scheduled for destruction documents that either directly affected veterans' benefits, could have affected them, or should have at least been kept in veterans' claim folders.

And these were just the documents discovered during the surprise audit, meaning the problem could be much more widespread than the OIG has found. "The potential effect should not be minimized. Considering that there are 56 VARO, and if weekly shredding is conducted, it is highly likely that claims-related documents at other VAROs are being improperly scheduled for destruction that could result in loss of claims and evidence, incorrect decisions and delays in claims processing," the report concluded.

The VA has struggled with scandals for nearly three years since news emerged out of Phoenix of chronic delays for veterans seeking medical care, and falsified records covering up the long waits. Similar problems were soon discovered at VA medical centers nationwide, affecting thousands of veterans and prompting an outcry in Congress.

<https://thehornnews.com/busted-feds-caught-shredding-veterans-health-claims/>

Title: Review of Claims-Related Documents Pending Destruction at VA Regional Offices

Report Number: 15-04652-146

Issue Date: 4/14/2016

City/State:

Baltimore, MD

Chicago, IL

Houston, TX

New Orleans, LA

Oakland, CA

Philadelphia, PA

Reno, NV
St. Petersburg, FL
Decatur, GA
Hato Rey, PR

VA Office: Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

Report Author: Office of Audits and Evaluations

Report Type: Audits, Reviews & Evaluations

Release Type: Unrestricted

Summary: In January 2015, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) received an anonymous allegation that Los Angeles VA Regional Office (VARO) staff were inappropriately shredding mail related to veterans' disability compensation claims. We could not substantiate Los Angeles VARO staff inappropriately shredded claims related documents prior to our review. However, we identified Los Angeles VARO staff were not following Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) policy on the management of veterans' and other governmental paper records. In August 2015, we made recommendations to the Los Angeles VARO Director and published the interim report on August 17, 2015. We then conducted unannounced random inspections at 10 other VAROs, to determine if this was a systemic issue. We focused this review on the improper destruction of veterans' claims related documents at those 10 VAROs. We found VBA's controls were not effective to prevent VARO staff from potentially destroying claims related documents. We identified 69 of 155 claims related documents improperly scheduled for destruction, which staff at 6 of the 10 VAROs had not properly associated with veterans' claims folders. Two of these documents affected benefits, 9 had the potential to affect benefits, and 58 did not affect benefits, but were still required to be included in the veterans' claims folders or VBA's electronic systems and could have been destroyed thereafter. As we identified problems at 6 of the 10 VAROs, **we concluded this is a systemic issue within VBA.** Noncompliance with policy, inadequate controls, and outdated guidance can lead to the potential destruction of claims related documents. **Both VARO staff and management found VBA's policy confusing and did not always receive annual training as required.** Further, records management staff did not consistently review documents or maintain violation logs. These actions put documents at risk for inappropriate destruction, which could result in loss of claims and medical evidence, incorrect decisions, and delays in claims processing. **We recommended the Acting Under Secretary for Benefits ensure VARO compliance with policy, update and clarify policy and procedures, and provide training where needed. The Acting Under Secretary for Benefits concurred with our recommendations. Management's planned actions are responsive and we will follow up as required.**