

Business Ethics Case Studies
Whistleblowing and the Environment:
The Case of Avco Environmental

Chantale Leroux works as a clerk for Avco Environmental Services, a small toxic-waste disposal company.

The company has a contract to dispose medical waste from a local hospital. During the course of her work, Chantale comes across documents that suggest that Avco actually disposed of some of this medical waste in a local municipal landfill. Chantale is shocked. She knows this practice is illegal. Even though only a small portion of the medical waste that Avco handles is being disposed of in this way, any amount at all seems a worrisome threat to public health.

Chantale gathers together the appropriate documents and takes them to her immediate superior, Dave Lamb. Dave says, "Look, I don't think that sort of thing is your concern or mine. We're in charge of record-keeping, not making decisions about where this stuff gets dumped. I suggest you drop it."

The next day, Chantale decides to go one step further, and talk to Angela van Wilgenburg, the company's Operations Manager. Angela is clearly irritated. Angela says, "This isn't your concern. Look, these are the sorts of cost-cutting moves that let a little company like ours compete with our giant competitors. Besides, everyone knows that the regulations in this area are overly cautious. There's no real danger to anyone from the tiny amount of medical waste that 'slips' into the municipal dump. I consider this matter closed."

Chantale considers her situation. The message from her superiors is loud and clear. She strongly suspects that making further noises about this issue could jeopardize her job. Further, she generally has faith in the company's management. They've always seemed like honest, trustworthy people. But she is troubled by this apparent disregard for public safety. On the other hand, she asks herself whether maybe Angela is right in arguing that the danger is minimal. Chantale looks up the phone number of an old friend who worked for the local newspaper.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What should Chantale do?
2. What are the reasonable limits on loyalty to one's employer?
3. Would it make a difference if Chantale had a position of greater authority?
4. Would it make a difference if Chantale had scientific expertise?

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