

## Food inspection worker fired for what he found on shared computer, union says

By Omar El Akkad

OTTAWA -- Luc Pomerleau's union says he was fired from his public service job not because of what he did, but because of what he found.

The Canadian Food Inspection Agency employee came across a Treasury Board document on a shared CFIA computer last May. According to the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada, Mr. Pomerleau's union, the document contained information relating to "strategic programs review" in which departments and agencies looked at cutting about 5 per cent of their operating budgets.

Union president Michèle Demers said yesterday the document outlined a way the CFIA could make such cuts: by handing responsibility for the labelling of products over to industry.

"There is no mandatory pre-market review of labels after this is implemented, and the industry has the responsibility to comply and to ensure that the labels are reflective of the contents," Ms. Demers said of the proposal. "The [CFIA] is delegating to them the responsibility to ensure that the health and safety of Canadians is safeguarded through quality of foods. That is not the authority nor the mandate of industry - it is that of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency."

Mr. Pomerleau, who has about 20 years experience in public service and worked in CFIA's areas of consumer protection and food labelling, sent the document to his union, asking what impact such changes might have. Since the documents were on a shared drive, Mr. Pomerleau said in an interview, they were available to any employee.

Last Friday, after an internal investigation, Mr. Pomerleau was fired and his "reliability status," a security clearance required for his job, was revoked.

"I was astonished," said the father of two. "I didn't expect such a reaction. "

Ms. Demers contends that Mr. Pomerleau was fired because showing the union the changes outlined in the document effectively stripped the CFIA of its ability to "de-dramatize" the consequences those changes could have on the union and Canadians.

"The decision, the reaction of the agency was completely outrageous," she said. "They needed a scapegoat."

However, the CFIA says due process was followed.

JP St-Amand, executive director of assets and security management, would not discuss Mr. Pomerleau's situation specifically, citing privacy reasons. However, he said that in general, when employees sign on with the agency, they agree to comply with the rules relating to the transmission of information. When those rules are broken, he added, the repercussions can be serious.

The union is fighting to get Mr. Pomerleau reinstated. However, it is uncertain how successful those efforts will be. Ms. Demers said there are clear guidelines outlining how confidential documents should be stored and marked. However, she said the document was not clearly marked. She also questioned why such a document would be scanned and placed on a shared drive.

"The fact that this employee found the document on the server and shared it was just a drop of water in the ocean with respect to how this document was manipulated in the first place," she said.

The union would not release a copy of the document to a journalist, saying it is now in CFIA's hands. CFIA would not comment on the document or its contents.