MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In response to a report issued in April, the Department of State (Department) developed a Facility Emergency Action Plan (FEAP) for eight domestic facilities, thereby decreasing the risk to personnel for injury or loss of life. In Management Assistance Report: Improvements Needed in Procedures for Emergency Action Planning at Selected Department of State Domestic Facilities (AUD-SI-22-27), OIG determined that the eight facilities used as of October 2021 did not have a FEAP in place. Such plans are meant to provide facility occupants with guidance on evacuation or shelter-in-place procedures.

In April 2022, Ivo Krasimirov Ivanov, Donna Karakatsani, and Todor Milkov Stoenchev pled guilty to one count each of theft of public funds. Internal Revenue Service and OIG special agents determined the individuals stole hundreds of exchange visitor identities to submit tax returns and apply for COVID-19 stimulus checks in their names. The federal government estimates that from February 2019 through April 2021, approximately $850,000 in Internal Revenue Service (IRS) refunds and Economic Impact Payments were improperly paid because of this scheme. Sentencing is pending.

In April 2022, Olayinka Agboola was sentenced to 12 months and 1 day in federal prison and 2 years of supervised release while Wanda Barker was sentenced to 18 months in federal prison and 2 years of supervised release after pleading guilty to money laundering charges. Previously, Agboola, Barker, and co-conspirator Linda Johnson pled guilty to engaging in monetary transactions in property derived from specified unlawful activity. A year earlier (October 2020), Barker, Agboola, and Johnson were indicted for using a business email compromise scheme to defraud the Department. OIG and FBI special agents determined the individuals tricked the Department and a non-profit agency into wiring at least $575,000 into bank accounts they controlled for the purpose of enriching themselves and their co-conspirators. It is estimated the Department and U.S. Grains Council lost over $281,000 because of the scheme.

John Christian Rutledge was sentenced to 42 months in federal prison and 2 years of supervised release in April 2022 after pleading guilty to wrongful use of government seals. In addition, Rutledge was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of $1,454,970.

In April 2022, May Salehi was sentenced to 12 months in prison, 3 years of supervised release, and ordered to forfeit $60,000 and to pay a $500,000 fine for conspiring to commit honest services fraud. Salehi was a longtime State Department employee who was involved in evaluating bids for critical overseas government construction projects such as U.S. embassies and consulates. United States Attorney’s Office, IRS, and OIG special agents determined Salehi gave confidential inside bidding information to Sina Moayedi, a government contractor, and received $60,000 in kickback payments in return.
In April 2022, while in federal custody, Diane Sturgis was sentenced to 30 months imprisonment, of which 24 months will run concurrently. Sturgis pled guilty in February 2022 to a single count of conspiracy to commit bribery and honest services mail fraud. Previously, in December 2021, William Snow, a former contractor who worked for a firm that provided professional staffing services to the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), was indicted for engaging in a bribery and fraud scheme with Sturgis, a former contracting officer.

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS

‘Alumni Open Talks’ Increase American Influence in Uruguay (Inspection of Embassy Montevideo, Uruguay, ISP-I-22-11)

Embassy Montevideo’s Public Diplomacy Section launched “Alumni Open Talks,” a resourceful response to the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. While teleworking, section staff members coordinated and hosted a series of 30-minute Facebook live-streamed talks. Uruguayan public diplomacy program alumni conducted talks that focused on pandemic-related matters, such as 3-D printing of face masks and the global economic impact of COVID-19. Based on the success of the talks, the section expanded the range of topics beyond COVID-19 to include talks on renewable energy, entrepreneurship, environmental protection, and science education. As of July 2021, the section had hosted 18 “Alumni Open Talks,” reaching an average audience size of approximately 1,000, with some sessions attracting nearly 2,000 participants. As a result, the section was able to increase American influence in Uruguay.

NEW WORK STARTED

• Audit of the Management and Administration of the ConsularOne Systems Modernization Program
• Audit of the Department of State FY 2022 Information Security Program
• Audit of the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, U.S. Section, FY 2022 Information Security Program
• Audit of the U.S. Agency for Global Media FY 2022 Information Security Program

REPORTS ISSUED

• Inspection of Embassy Montevideo, Uruguay (ISP-I-22-11)