



# Memorandum

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To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor  
The Honorable Chairperson Joe Martinez  
Members, Board of County Commissioners

From: Christopher Mazzella  
Inspector General

Date: September 19, 2006

Re: Arrest of Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc. Employee

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Attached is a news release relating to an investigation by the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) that has resulted in a federal grand jury indictment of Maria Valdes-Burgos (Valdes-Burgos), an employee of Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc. On August 24, 2006, Valdes-Burgos was indicted on nineteen (19) counts of wire fraud and today was brought before a U.S. Magistrate Judge for her initial appearance on the charges. Valdes-Burgos worked for the Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc. ("PMCM"), a not-for-profit corporation established by the County. PMCM provides maintenance, repair, and purchases associated with the operation of the County's gantry cranes at the Port of Miami. The County funds all of PMCM operational expenditures, including employee salaries.

The OIG investigation uncovered that Valdes-Burgos, through her duties as an inventory coordinator and payroll clerk, falsified weekly payroll hours using a former employee's name and, on one occasion, used a current employee's name, while that employee was out on sick leave. The investigation revealed that Valdes-Burgos caused the falsified payroll checks to be electronically deposited into her personal bank account. An OIG investigation determined that \$17,087.66 was deposited directly into Valdes-Burgos' account. The County, however, as a result of this fraud, actually paid out a total of \$33,968.79 in gross wages and direct payments of union dues, which it is now seeking to recover. Valdes-Burgos was terminated from her employment.

This matter was initially brought to the attention of the OIG by management for the Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc. It is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida.

cc: Mr. George Burgess, County Manager  
Mr. Bill Johnson, Interim Director, Port of Miami  
Mr. Ed Bello, Chief Executive Officer, Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc.  
Mr. Vladimir Murad, Director of Operations, Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc.  
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services  
Mr. Charles Anderson, Commission Auditor  
Clerk of the Board (copy filed)



**U.S. Department of Justice**

*United States Attorney  
Southern District of Florida*

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September 20, 2006

**NEWS RELEASE:**

**FORMER PORT OF MIAMI EMPLOYEE MAKES  
INITIAL APPEARANCE ON FRAUD CHARGES**

R. Alexander Acosta, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, and Christopher R. Mazzella, Inspector General for Miami-Dade County, announced today that defendant **Maria Valdes-Burgos**, 44, of Miami, Florida, made her initial appearance today before United States Magistrate Judge Robert L. Dube, and was released on bond. On August 24, 2006, a federal grand jury had returned an indictment charging Maria Valdes-Burgos with nineteen (19) counts of wire fraud, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1343. If convicted, she faces a statutory maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment and \$250,000 fine as to each count.

According to the Indictment, defendant Maria Valdes-Burgos was employed by the Port of Miami Crane Management, Inc. ("PMCM"), a not-for-profit corporation established by Miami-Dade County. PMCM was responsible for providing the maintenance, repair, and purchases associated with the operation of the gantry cranes at the Port of Miami. Miami-Dade County owned the gantry cranes, and funded all of PMCM operational expenditures, including employee salaries. PMCM employed approximately 33 crane technicians, mechanics, foremen, and temporary workers, all members of the International Longshoremen's Association Local 1922.

Valdes-Burgos was the inventory coordinator and payroll clerk, who prepared the PMCM mechanics' weekly payroll. As alleged in the Indictment, the defendant submitted false weekly payroll hours using a former employee's name on nineteen separate occasions, and in the name of a current employee on one occasion. She allegedly then caused the deposit of these employees' payroll checks into her personal bank account. From November 22, 2005, to April 20, 2006, Miami-Dade County paid \$33,968.79 as a result of the fraudulent payroll submissions, with \$17,087.66 deposited directly into defendant's personal account at the Bank of America in Miami-Dade County.

United States Attorney Acosta stated, "No show jobs and ghost employee schemes divert our tax dollars, corrupt our government, and shake public confidence in our public servants. For this reason, regardless of the size of the case or the post of the individual, my office is committed to aggressively prosecuting public corruption at all levels of government."

Inspector General Christopher Mazzella stressed that his office will continue to target payroll fraud that drain government resources, especially those impacting the seaport. Mr. Mazzella commended the United States Attorneys Office for taking a proactive stance in prosecuting this case.

Mr. Acosta commended the investigative efforts of the Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General. This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Christopher J. Clark.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida at [www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/fls). Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Southern District of Florida at [www.flsd.uscourts.gov](http://www.flsd.uscourts.gov) or on <http://pacer.flsd.uscourts.gov>.