

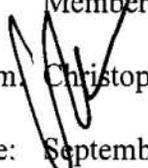
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**Office of the Inspector General  
Miami-Dade County**

# Memorandum

To: The Honorable Carlos Alvarez, Mayor

The Honorable Chairperson Joe Martinez  
Members, Board of County Commissioners

From:  Christopher Mazzella, Inspector General

Date: September 29, 2005

Re: Fuel Farm – Patricia Nichols' Disposition

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In connection with the ongoing investigation of the Miami International Airport (MIA) Fuel Facility a.k.a. "Fuel Farm," Miami-Dade Aviation Department (MDAD) employee Patricia E. Nichols pled guilty on September 28, 2005 to one count of unlawful compensation.

Last month, on August 19, 2005, Ms. Nichols and her attorney met with members of the Fuel Farm Investigative Team, comprised of investigators from the Office of the Inspector General and the State Attorney's Office. At this meeting, Ms. Nichols admitted that the charges filed against her last year in connection with the MIA Fuel Farm investigation were indeed appropriate. This admission led to the plea agreement that Ms. Nichols entered into yesterday. The plea requires Ms. Nichols to cooperate with the Fuel Farm Investigative Team in all matters relating to the case.

Ms. Nichols was hired by Miami-Dade County in June of 1990. At the time of her arrest, she was employed at the Aviation Department as a Special Projects Administrator 2. In this position, Ms. Nichols was responsible for managing the MIA Fuel Farm. Some of Ms. Nichols' responsibilities included establishing the annual budget, approving all expenditures, determining maintenance projects for the facility, awarding contracts, and monitoring Aircraft Services International Group (ASIG), the company which managed the day-to-day operations of the facility.

After the arrests were made, MDAD management suspended Ms. Nichols without pay but had not officially terminated her. However, pursuant to the plea agreement, Ms. Nichols will resign. During our investigation, but prior to the filing of formal charges, the OIG placed a payment block on Ms. Nichols' accrued annual and sick leave. This measure is taken by the OIG to prevent the payout of these monies when the employee knows that they are under investigation and then abruptly resign. If Ms. Nichols were to have resigned in the regular course, without the block placed, she could have been received over \$12,000

in accrued sick and annual leave. While Ms. Nichols is resigning now as part of her plea agreement, her plea of guilty to this charge subjects her accrued sick and annual leave to forfeiture.

As you may be aware, the operator of the facility, ASIG, pled guilty last week for its role as the means by which the criminal activity transpired. The Team negotiated a \$2.5 million restitution payment for losses associated with the theft and mismanagement. The Team has met with a consortium of airlines and MDAD management to discuss the distribution of these funds. While there has already been much attention paid to the investigative efforts to date and the individuals who have been charged criminally and/or have already pled guilty, this investigation is still ongoing and more arrests are anticipated.

CC: George M. Burgess, County Manger  
Jose Abreu, Director, Miami-Dade Aviation Department  
Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit and Management Services Department

Clerk of the Board (copy filed)