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Office of the Inspector General
Miami-Dade County

Memorandum

To: The Hon. Mayor Alex Penelas, Miami-Dade County

The Hon. Dr. Barbara Carey-Shuler, Chair
and Members of the Board of County Commissioners

From: Christopher Mazzella,
Inspector General

Date: February 5, 2003

Re: Istvan "Steven" Fazekas – Former Engineer for the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Dept.

Attached is a news release relating to the arrest of Istvan "Steven" Fazekas who was an engineer at the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Department. Fazekas was the county official responsible for reviewing and approving fire sprinkler plans for building structures within the County. An OIG investigation determined that Fazekas secretly operated two companies that received approximately one million dollars from fire sprinkler companies to draft fire sprinkler plans that were, in turn, submitted to him for review and approval.

Fazekas has been charged with bribery, money laundering, perjury, fraud, and other serious crimes. He resigned from County employment during the course of the investigation. The investigation is continuing and we expect additional arrests.

Additionally, the Fire Rescue Department will undertake a thorough review of fire sprinkler plans approved by Fazekas in his official capacity and it will implement procedures to insure that abuses detected in this investigation will not occur in the future.

cc: Mr. Charles Phillips, Fire Chief, Miami-Dade Fire Rescue
Mr. Steve Shiver, County Manager
Mr. Robert Ginsburg, County Attorney
Mr. Samuel Williams, Assistant County Manager
Mr. Charlie Danger, Director, Miami-Dade Building Department
Ms. Cathy Jackson, Director, Audit & Management Services

Clerk of the Board (Copy Filed)

News Release

County Official Arrested for Bribery and Money Laundering

A veteran county official in charge of approving critical fire sprinkler plans for building structures was arrested today for bribery, money laundering, perjury and other serious crimes. The official resigned during the course of the investigation.

The arrest was the result of an investigation conducted by the Miami-Dade County Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Dade County State Attorneys Office. The investigation determined that the defendant, Istvan "Steven" Fazekas, age 52, a resident of Miami-Dade County, engaged in a scheme to defraud the citizens of the county of their right to honest government services. Specifically, according to an affidavit filed by a Special Agent of the Office of the Inspector General, Fazekas secretly owned two unlicensed companies that received almost one million dollars from at least seventeen fire sprinkler businesses to draft fire sprinkler plans for building structures in Miami-Dade County. The two companies are SAF International Corp, 7470 Miami Lakes Drive, Apt. B206, Miami Lakes, Florida and Firebyte, Inc., 7470 Miami Lakes Drive, Apt B206, Miami Lakes, Florida.

Many of these very same plans drafted by Fazekas's businesses were subsequently submitted to the County and, in turn, were reviewed and approved by Fazekas himself in his official capacity as a County official even though it was his own two companies that drafted the plans.

Fazekas laundered the proceeds of his secret businesses through bank accounts he clandestinely controlled, or by cashing forged checks. Among other charges, Fazekas is accused of receiving approximately \$45,000 in bribes from two fire sprinkler businesses. The bribes were paid by Jerome Cohen of A-1 Fire Sprinkler Corporation d/b/a All Fire Services, Inc., 2027 Sherman Street, Hollywood, Florida and Jorge Carballo, Jr., of Cardel Fire Protection, Inc., 1430 N.W. 108th Avenue, Suite 101 Miami, Florida.

In commenting on the investigation, Inspector General Chris Mazzella stressed that regulations aimed at protecting the public safety must be vigorously defended against unscrupulous conduct and unethical behavior. Mr. Mazzella said that Fazekas's brazen actions jeopardized the integrity of the County's fire suppression oversight and that such conduct would not be tolerated. Mr. Mazzella hoped that Fazekas's arrest would help restore the public's confidence in this program. Mr. Mazzella indicated that the investigation is continuing and that more arrests are expected.

The State Attorneys Office recommended that Fazekas's bond be set at \$100,000. If convicted, he faces a maximum sentence of 245 years (jail time) and \$2,890,000 in fines. A copy of the arrest warrant and supporting affidavit can be obtained by contacting the Office of the Inspector General at 305-375-1946.