

City employee rehired

BY JERRY ABBOTT

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A Torrington city employee got his job back Monday, after a tentative settlement regarding his earlier dismissal.

In July 2005, Jeff Craig, an employee of the Torrington Water Department, saw non-chlorinated, non-potable water being released into the city water supply. He advised his supervisor, who told him no action would be taken. Craig then reported the incident to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA contacted the city of Torrington regarding the alleged Safe Drinking Water Act violation. The city suspended Craig with pay and later terminated him for "failure to follow the chain of command" and "insubordination."

The Department of Labor, Occupational and Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) sent a letter in December 2005 to the city ordering Craig be given back his job at the same pay and that he be reimbursed for back pay, legal fees and compensatory damages. The city appealed the OSHA determination, but before a hearing was held on the appeal, Craig and the city reached an out-of-court settlement.

After investigation, OSHA determined that Craig had participated in protected activity under the Safe Drinking Water Act in voicing concern to his supervisor and the EPA about the release of non-potable, non-chlorinated water into the city water supply. As a result, they ordered the city of Torrington to reinstate Craig to the same or similar position at the same salary and other benefits as well as pay back wages, Craig's legal fees and compensatory damages.

Craig's attorney, Richard Renner, said the city appealed the OSHA determination, and a hearing was set for April 18 in Cheyenne.

"The matter has been settled and Jeff Craig (went) back to work on Monday," Jim Eddington, city attorney said. "Neither of the parties is admitting any liability in this matter."

Eddington said any other information concerning the case is confidential.

Craig said Monday he is back to work in the same job he held before his water contamination case.

"The check should be in the mail today (March 23) to Mr. Craig and to our office," Renner said.

"We will wait 10 days for the check to clear and then send the settlement to the judge."

As of Tuesday, Renner said he had received no checks.

With mailing time and stated delays in forwarding settlement paperwork to the settlement judge in San Francisco, Calif., a determination as to the settlement may not occur for three to four weeks.

jabbott@torringtontelegram.com