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Shell staff contact list leaked to environmental campaign groups

By Ed Crooks in London

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Royal Dutch Shell has suffered a serious breach of security after contact details for more than 170,000 employees and contractors were e-mailed to environmental and human rights campaign groups.

The database, from Shell's internal directory, gives names and telephone numbers for all the company's workforce worldwide, including some home numbers used for business. The e-mail was ostensibly sent by disaffected staff calling for a "peaceful corporate revolution" at the company.

The database was e-mailed with a 170-page covering note, explaining that it was being circulated by "116 concerned employees of Shell Oil dispersed throughout the USA, the UK, and the Netherlands", to highlight the harm allegedly done by the company's operations in Nigeria.

Shell confirmed the database was genuine, but said it did not pose a security risk because it did not include home addresses. It said it was investigating the security breach but did not believe the claim it had been leaked by disaffected staff.

The leak of data nevertheless raises the prospect that the company may be subject to further action by campaigners.

The e-mail sets out a four-stage strategy for raising awareness of allegations about Shell's practices in Nigeria, including campaigns to target the media and institutional investors.

It also advocates "having people from NGOs [non-governmental organisations] becoming full-time (undercover) employees of corporations (in western countries)" to campaign for change in corporate practices.

With no identifiable Shell staff admitting responsibility, it is impossible to know if the claim of 116 internal supporters is true.

The e-mail says that the staff have to remain anonymous because they "have families to feed, clothe, and shelter, so we badly need to keep our jobs".

The leaked information is about six months old, suggesting it could have been taken by a former employee. Shell cut 5,000 jobs last year and recently announced a further 1,000 job losses for this year.

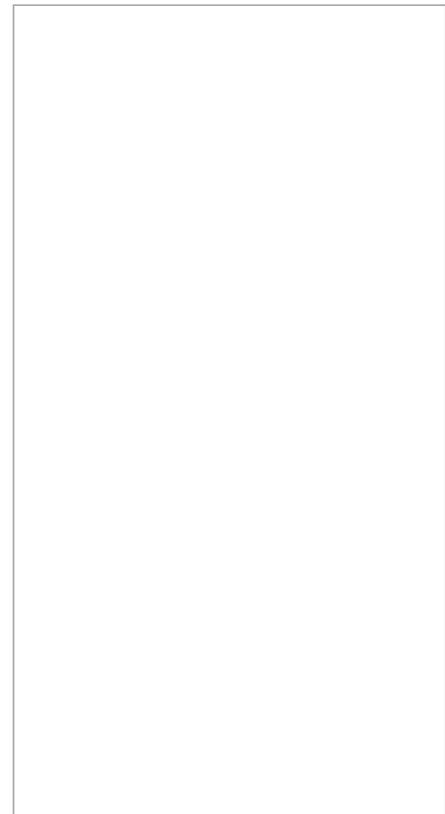
The e-mail was sent to a handful of campaign groups, including Greenpeace, and to www.royaldutchshellplc.com, a website used to air grievances about Shell.

One campaigner who was sent the e-mail said it did not count as corporate whistle-blowing, because no important information had been disclosed, but nor did it look like a hoax.

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