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Shell employees' details leaked to environmental campaigners

By Ed Crooks in London

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Contact details for 176,000 employees and contractors of Royal Dutch Shell have been sent to environmental and human rights campaign groups, ostensibly by disaffected staff calling for a "peaceful corporate revolution" at the company.

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.

It 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 that 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 supporters is true.

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.

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