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Shell staff details exposed online in security leak risk

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Friday February 12 2010

Thousands of Shell employees had their confidential information circulated on the internet in a massive security breach for the oil giant.

A database of Shell's global worldwide workforce was distributed to human rights groups and environmental activists.

The database, from Shell's internal directory, gives names and telephone numbers for up to 170,000 employee, including some home numbers used for business.

The email claimed to be sent by disaffected staff based in the US, Holland and the UK who were pressing for changes within the company.

Shell confirmed that the database, which is about six months old, was genuine but played down concerns about the security implications, claiming that it did not include personal addresses.

The group also rejected the claim that it had been circulated by any of its own staff.

The security breach has emerged as Shell is in the midst of a major restructuring drive led by Peter Voser, the group's new chief executive.

The oil company cut 5,000 jobs last year and recently announced a further 1,000 job losses for this year.

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

The email 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.

The email included a 170-page covering note claiming to be from "116 concerned employees of Shell" and accusing the company of alleged harmful practices in Nigeria.

The email was sent to campaign groups, including Greenpeace, and a website used to air grievances about Shell.

Action

However, there is no identifiable staff who have admitted responsibility and it is impossible to know if the claim of 116 supporters is true.

Yesterday, Shell to Sea activists in Ireland were strongly criticised for their action against the controversial Corrib Gas project in Co Mayo.

Judge Raymond Groarke told a leading member of the group, Moira Harrington, that she and her associates were acting like a secret police force.

He said people had a legitimate right to protest but that vigilante behaviour by "private armies" in the Corrib gas dispute would not be tolerated.

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