

Protest: Tongue Point's operations assessed each year

Continued from Page 1A

"Throughout my employment, I reported my safety concerns to my supervisors and managers," Jones said in both her complaints. "I reported malfunctioning equipment, an unlicensed supervisor operating boats, and proper procedures not being followed, creating unsafe environments and injuries."

In a report last month to the U.S. Department of Labor, which oversees Job Corps, Vice President Dean Hoffman of the western region of Management and Training Corp. said the company investigated 17 different allegations by Jones, interviewing most students and staff in the seamanship program. The report found almost all of her allegations unfounded, except for some minor issues. Investigators recommended an annual plan for replacement of supplies, and noted several log book entries not filled out completely.

Hoffman said the corporation assesses Tongue Point's operations each year. He added that a fuller assessment would be conducted in the future, with a person specifically assigned to the seamanship program. As a follow-up to the investigation, he said, the corporation will review the finances of the program in six months to ensure needs are being met.



The Tongue Point Job Corps buoy tender Ironwood navigates downstream toward the Columbia River bar.

Daily Astorian/File Photo

No license, no problem

Len Tumbarello, a former second-in-command of the U.S. Coast Guard's Sector Columbia River who retired shortly before taking the helm of Tongue Point's seamanship program in summer 2013, has made appearances in both

Jones' and Ferguson's complaints.

Upon his hiring, Tumbarello said he needed more at-sea time and to take some tests to get the proper merchant mariner's license to operate the Ironwood, a former Coast Guard buoy tender used as a

seamanship training vessel. He still lacks the proper license.

But the corporation's report found Tumbarello is not required to be a licensed. Other licensed captains are on board when the Ironwood is underway, and an instructor in

the program recently obtained the proper license.

Kim Shillinger, the director of Tongue Point, said the center was lucky to get Tumbarello, who has a master's in education and a 26-year history with the Coast Guard. Shillinger said Tongue Point

is confident it will soon get a waiver from the labor department, which owns the boat, to give Tumbarello until the end of January 2017 to get the proper licensing.

Shillinger said he has full confidence in the seamanship staff and the education students are getting. Tongue Point has the only Job Corps seamanship program in the country and is one of the most valuable trades it offers, as far as income after graduation.

Right of way

One particularly stinging allegation surrounded a minor collision between the Ironwood and the fishing boat Miss Emily near Point Adams in July. The collision was logged with the Coast Guard, which declined to investigate because of the minor nature of the damage.

The vessel's captain, Thomas Lloyd, said the Ironwood ran into and scraped his outrigger while he was towing another fishing vessel upriver. In his report, Hoffman said the corporation maintains the Ironwood was not at fault based on navigation regulations, video of the accident and radio conversations during the incident recorded by the Coast Guard.

Hoffman said the corporation's risk assessment department is conducting a joint investigation with the company's insurer.

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