

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**SEATTLE CITY LIGHT
NETWORK INVESTIGATION**

**BY CATHRYN V. DAMMEL
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BACKGROUND

Over a period of years, Seattle City Light's ("City Light") Network Group ("Network") has been the subject of sporadic, anonymous complaints that employees were drinking and intoxicated at work, sharing pornography, and treating coworkers with disrespect.¹ Despite its best efforts, City Light could not identify witnesses or sufficiently substantiate the reports to warrant an investigation.

On October 5, 2022, a Network employee came forward with similar claims, followed eight days later by a union representative's phone call to City Light's Chief Executive Officer, and a few weeks later by two anonymous reports to the City of Seattle Office of the Employee Ombud.² The new allegations were more of the same, still largely hearsay and of unknown origin.

City Light engaged me, an independent, outside investigator, to look into the numerous allegations of wrongdoing by Network employees dating back several years. The complaints leading up to this investigation implicated as subjects seven then-current Network employees. By the close of my initial inquiries, forty City Light workers had been implicated as subjects in some form of workplace misconduct.³

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Without a formal complainant, I began my investigation by selecting for interviews employees who represented various positions, seniority, and tenure in the Network group. Between March 3, 2023, and February 26, 2025, I interviewed seventy-three individuals.⁴

¹ Unless otherwise specified, in this report the words "drink" and "drinking" reference drinking alcoholic beverages.

² Confidentiality is an important principle for the Office of the Employee Ombud. Information can only be shared with the express permission of the reporting employee unless there is an imminent risk of serious harm to the employee or others. Within these strict confines and without identifying the reporters, the Office of the Employee Ombud was able to share with City Light's People & Culture Business Unit the substance of the two anonymous reports.

³ A few other former City Light employees who were implicated in wrongdoing vacated their Network positions before my investigation began. They are not subjects in this investigation because they were not in their roles at the time my investigation began and there was no indication they would return to active employment with the utility. There are other employees who, although they left the Network before my investigation began, were investigated as subjects because they continue in active employment with other work groups at City Light.

⁴ In its written notice of interview, City Light reminded participants of the importance of being truthful in the investigation and of confidentiality to respect the privacy of all involved and the integrity of the process; that

I analyzed hundreds of documents provided by City Light, the City of Seattle, subjects, and witnesses. I looked at physical evidence including, among other things, the Network's North Service Center, a close-up view of the work truck, inside and out, and the "little white cups," an oft-cited piece of evidence.⁵ I otherwise educated myself about the workplace, what Cable Splicers do, why their jobs are critical, and how their work intertwines with other City Light employees and the general public.

THE WORKPLACE

Seattle City Light ("City Light") is a publicly owned utility. It operates sixteen major substations and delivers electricity to over 460,000 business and residential customers across 131 square miles in Seattle and surrounding areas. It also owns and operates seven hydro-electric dams generating electrical power. It has more than 2,500 miles of overhead and underground cable and fifty miles of high-voltage transmission lines.

A. Network Group

City Light's Network Group is part of the Transmission and Distribution Operations Division and services the downtown Seattle core from South King Street to Lake Union to I-5 and the waterfront. It employs approximately ninety employees including Cable Splicer Apprentices, Cable Splicers, Crew Chiefs, Electrical Reviewers, Material

it does not tolerate retaliation of any kind; and that any represented employees were welcome to bring a union representative to their interview.

At the outset of each interview, I reiterated these rights and obligations, gave examples of what retaliation could look like, and advised witnesses to contact me, their union representative or Employee Relations should they feel they were being retaliated against for participating in this investigation.

Most employees were accompanied by their union representative. The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 77 represents Cable Splicer Apprentices, Cable Splicers, and Cable Splicer Crew Chiefs. The Washington State Council of County and City Employees AFSCME, AFL-CIO, Local 21C represents City Light Managers and Supervisors.

Three interviewees were accompanied by private legal counsel. In those meetings, a Seattle Assistant City Attorney was also present.

At the conclusion of each interview, I invited the witness to contact me with any further information and provided my business card and/or contact information via email. I emailed all participants more than once to give them the opportunity to add to and/or modify their statements before I closed out the evidence. In one message, I also reached out to all current Network employees whom I had not interviewed encouraging them to come forward should they have any relevant information.

⁵ At all relevant times, City Light supplied work trucks with "little white cups" for drinking water. The cups hold eight ounces, are made of durable poly paper, have handles, and are suitable for hot beverages as well.

Suppliers, Locators, and Supervisors. During the time interviews were conducted for this investigation, less than six percent of this group was female.

In addition to regular maintenance tasks, Network crews are involved in all types of construction performed to build an underground distribution network. They oversee the work of other trades during construction and function as the on-site subject matter experts as well as safety watch for these other groups. Network crews bend and install conduits, install and remove high-voltage and low-voltage cables and equipment, and remove and install transformers in underground and building vaults. They also splice and terminate cables in substations, underground, and in building vaults. On any day at any hour, Network crews also must be ready to respond to customer outages and emergencies such as fires.

B. Cable Splicers

Upon hire, Cable Splicer Apprentices begin a four-year program that leads to becoming a qualified journey-level Cable Splicer. In a supervised combination of hands-on, on-the-job training and academic classroom-style education, they learn to splice, terminate, and maintain low- and high-voltage power cables in an underground network distribution system. They learn to install and maintain conductors, transformers, network protectors, relays, switches, and related electrical equipment. They also learn to locate and repair electrical faults and perform physically demanding work in confined areas such as vaults and tunnels.

Following two weeks of safety training, Apprentices are assigned to a crew. They work in the field under a Crew Chief's supervision, rotating every three months to a different crew. They also must complete a minimum of 144 hours per year of academic training in the evening.

When Apprentices "top out" as Journeyworker Cable Splicers, they take on primary responsibility for installing, terminating, and maintaining low- and high-voltage underground transmission cables and network distribution systems. The job requires expertise in electricity and electrical theory as well as in safety rules and procedures.

Cable Splicer Crew Chiefs must have at least two years of journey-level experience, including one year working with voltages more than 2000 volts. It is their responsibility to schedule, assign, and review the work of Cable Splicers and Apprentices, and ensure compliance with safety procedures. They are also charged with training their subordinates as well as assessing and responding to emergency situations.

Network crews report to Supervisors, based at City Light's North Service Center ("NSC"). Crews begin their shifts at the NSC but primarily work in the field, without a Supervisor present.

C. Work Rules and Pay

Cable Splicer Apprentices, Cable Splicers, and Cable Splicer Crew Chiefs work pursuant to a collective bargaining agreement between the City of Seattle and the City Light Department and The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local No. 77. The contract provides for an eight-hour shift, plus a thirty-minute, unpaid lunch break. Standard working hours are 7:45 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.

To meet workload demands, hours of duty may be extended beyond 4:15 p.m. In that case, Network crews get an additional thirty-minute, unpaid dinner break from 4:15 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. Practically, the actual overtime work does not begin until 6:00 p.m., sometimes later, depending upon when rush-hour traffic clears in downtown Seattle. Between 4:45 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., crews are expected to plan, brief, and otherwise prepare for the overtime job.

Currently, the approximate starting hourly rate for Cable Splicer Apprentices is \$52, for journey-level Cable Splicers \$77, and for Crew Chiefs \$87. Some positions have step increases as employees gain experience and knowledge and/or annual cost of living increases.

Cable Splicers earn double-time pay for working over eight hours in a twenty-four-hour period, or over forty hours in a workweek. Network overtime is frequently available and can be lucrative, in some cases more than doubling a worker's annual pay.

D. A High-Risk Job

City Light Network crews work in the congested downtown Seattle core among pedestrians, vehicles, bicycles, and construction sites. Each crew drives a gold-colored "bread" or "box" truck with the Seattle City Light logo and phone number on its side that is stocked with necessary tools and materials. These trucks are large, measuring approximately eleven feet high, twenty-four feet long, and eight to ten feet wide. They take up a lot of space, are more difficult to drive, maneuver, and stop than passenger vehicles, and have comparatively poor visibility.

Network job sites have energized equipment and cables⁶ in confined areas, at heights, and in heavy city traffic. Network crews work in manholes that open onto main roads and walkways. In the "hole," there is little space to move around, and it is mostly dark. Employees descend on portable ladders that measure sixteen to eighteen feet, and sometimes on fixed ladders as long as twenty feet. They also use six- to eighteen-foot ladders to climb to heights above the surface. Network crews carry and use a variety of

⁹ In electrician's slang, "energized" is called "hot," meaning there is voltage and the possibility of current in the cable (also called "wire").

tools, some of them sharp. The duties, equipment, and work environment present multiple risks, such as falling, slipping, getting hit or cut, and sustaining other injuries.

If a worker operates the wrong switch, it could be fatal. If a worker drops a tool into a network protector, it could cause an arc flash.⁷ An electric arc could expose any person within its reach to radiant heat upwards of 20,000° Fahrenheit, a fireball, molten shrapnel projectiles, blinding light, a concussive blast, a sound deafening enough to rupture eardrums, and hazardous vaporous gasses.

Physical contact with an energized circuit can result in electrocution, which could potentially be fatal. A splicing error could cause the splice to fault, transforming it into, as one witness explained, “a bomb in a hole.” Large power equipment failures can result in severe injuries. Improper work can lead to customer outages.

Network crews have a complex, hazardous job. The utility expects its employees to be alert, rested, and physically able to perform their duties to ensure their safety and that of the general public.

ANONYMOUS, PRE-INVESTIGATION ALLEGATIONS

On October 26, 2017, an individual purporting to be a Network new hire complained to Labor Relations about a “very different” culture and “behavior that is difficult for me and some of my classmates to understand.” The anonymous writer, claiming to be a recovering alcoholic three-years-sober, stated that Apprentices were required to frequently buy alcohol to be accepted by Crew Chiefs and Journeyworkers, that employees drank on the clock, and that non-participants sat in their work trucks during dinner breaks while “the crews party in bars before starting overtime.” “The peer pressure [is] so great,” the Apprentice wrote, “that I have turned down working with some.”

The complainant went on to allege specifics:

- That a Crew Chief operated his work truck as “a rolling mobile bar with loud music” all evening, every night, with his Journeyworker serving drinks and the crew sharing porn.
- That another Crew Chief once consumed more than four drinks, then operated equipment while impaired.
- That a Journeyworker once smoked marijuana at work after getting yelled at by his Crew Chief for not paying attention during a job.
- That another Crew Chief once consumed more than three drinks and was so impaired she could not dial the phone correctly during a job.

⁷ An arc flash is an uncontrolled release of energy caused by an electric arc.

- That the complainant once stopped at a bar before an overtime shift with a Journeyworker who consumed three drinks, drove, then almost crashed the work truck.

The next month, an anonymous caller reported to the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries that his daughter, a Cable Splicer Apprentice, told him that employees went to bars after work and students were expected to buy their instructor alcohol in exchange for teaching the class. The caller reported that the Apprentice said that workers drank between regular and overtime shifts, then returned to the work site drunk. The caller relayed that one employee allegedly had three drinks and almost crashed the truck. He stated that his daughter had identified several offenders and told him there was peer pressure to participate.

On March 6, 2018, an individual identifying as “Overtime Splicer” emailed City Light management and the Mayor’s office with the subject line, “Tired of this.” The writer accused a Crew Chief and another Network employee of inappropriate touching and comments, sexual advances, rude gestures, and cell phone porn. The employee stated: “It really sucks showing up to work in fear but I need the money,” and signed off as, “Us too.”

On April 12, 2021, City Light received a Labor & Industries/Division of Occupational Safety and Health Referral alleging that two employees were creating an unsafe work environment through on-site consumption of alcohol. Allegedly, a Crew Chief and a Cable Splicer were “drunk and disorderly” in the evenings at Union and/or Broad substations. The anonymous complaint was signed by “two concerned Electrical Constructors.”⁸

With every anonymous complaint, City Light encouraged reporters to come forward. They tried to meet with female Cable Splicer Apprentices who declined the invitations. A Human Resources Outreach Specialist responded to “Overtime Splicer,” asking for more information, offering a meeting, and giving the writer options to cooperate while remaining anonymous. He received no response. Management also held meetings with Network employees to address the allegations, reiterate City Light policies, identify resources for reporting workplace concerns, and encourage those with personal knowledge to come forward. No one did. Without more specificity, City Light could not investigate and was, therefore, unable to substantiate or dismiss the anonymous complaints.

On October 5, 2022, a Network employee emailed their supervisor making numerous claims about “the hostile work environment, fostered by the usual suspects, and the on-going inappropriate behavior of the individuals.” They said that inappropriate behavior and retaliatory practices were “accepted as commonplace in our Network culture. As you

⁸ The correct job title is Electrician Constructor. Electrician Constructors are in a workgroup separate from the Network, also reporting up through the Transmission and Distribution Operations Division.

[the supervisor] well know, [A]pprentices are groomed, from the minute there [sic] start their Apprenticeship program to accept this behavior and to be loyal to the ring leaders, the chosen few, for personal gain.” They cited these examples, alleging:

- That every day one Network employee carried a flask of alcohol on his person and would refer to it as his “cough medicine,” openly taking swigs of it. This practice occurred regularly when he operated the vector truck in the busy Seattle downtown network.
- That another coworker had serious back problems and frequently took painkillers during work hours that visibly impaired him to the point that he should not drive.
- That one Crew Chief was “the ultimate ringleader and bully.”

A week later, on October 13, 2022, a union representative called City Light’s then-Chief Executive Officer and General Manager to report that he had received anonymous calls and emails about drinking in the Network and heard rumors about other inappropriate behavior.

On November 1, 2022, two separate, anonymous callers contacted the Office of the Employee Ombud:

- Anonymous Caller #1 alleged that a Crew Chief invited a female Cable Splicer to a bar and tried to get her drunk knowing she did not handle alcohol well. He allegedly took compromising photos or video of her.
- Anonymous Caller #2 alleged that the same Crew Chief acted as a “gang leader” to facilitate Network crew drinking between regular and overtime shifts and that City Light vehicles were used to visit three main bars (Station 18 in Ballard, Ballard Mandarin Restaurant, and Bar House in Fremont) before returning to the work site for the overtime shift.

On February 17, 2023, City Light formally engaged me to investigate the above allegations of wrongdoing in the Network.

EMPLOYEES’ DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE WORKPLACE: A TOXIC CULTURE VS. A HAPPY FAMILY

A. A Toxic Culture

Much like the anonymous complainants⁹ that preceded them, several witnesses in this investigation described the Network as a “shocking” environment where drinking has

⁹ I was unable to determine the identity of any of the anonymous complainants.

been culturally normalized and almost everyone was pressured to be a part of it. When asked to comment, one tearful and visibly shaken employee responded, “Where do I begin?” There are “so many stories my friends would think I am making them up, and so much that you get used to it, and it doesn’t seem crazy anymore.”

“[T]he sad part is that people show up as [A]pprentices and basically get indoctrinated into this drinking culture,” and “it’s made to seem like it’s okay, it’s definitely kind of a boys’ club mentality that if you want to fit in you’ve got to join along,” remarked a witness. Once, when an Apprentice did not order a beer with the drinking group, a Crew Chief bought and served him one anyway, asking if he was a “snitch.” “Employees who do not acquiesce or go along in that environment are not accepted or are treated as outsiders, if they can remain at [City Light], which many have not been able to do.”

1. Heavy Drinking, Coercion, and Repercussions for Not Participating

Upon hire, coworkers introduce Network Apprentices to what is called a “Buy.” The incoming class traditionally organizes and finances this party to celebrate their new job. The Apprentices contribute what can often amount to hundreds of dollars towards the event, regardless of whether they drink or can afford it. Some employees said they feel pressured to participate.¹⁰

Out in the field, certain Crew Chiefs allegedly “coached” new employees on their job duties. That means, according to one witness, taping over beer can labels before stocking the work truck’s drawer that has been converted into a “cooler” or “ice chest.” It also means knowing which type of hard alcohol their assigned crew liked, purchasing it at their own expense, and keeping the truck’s rag bin or makeshift bar stocked with the right bottle. Said another, it is common knowledge that certain crews kept alcohol in rag bins and common knowledge which crews they were.

Unwillingly, but feeling he had no choice, one Apprentice said he supplied the crew’s preferred bottle during his first two rotations. He knew it wasn’t acceptable but felt peer pressure and that he had to go along with it. He informed his wife that his crew was going through a lot of bottles at work, she would notice charges on their credit card, and it was getting expensive.

¹⁰ No one disputed the existence or expectations of “Buys.” They are commonly held to celebrate hirings, plus other milestones such as attaining journey level, becoming a Crew Chief, and the like. The propriety of “Buys” was not within the scope of this investigation. I mention the topic here because some employees feel it is part of the coercive drinking culture in the Network. Others disagree, saying they do not feel pressured to participate and find them a fun tradition. City Light does not endorse “Buys” and has instructed its employees not to organize or promote “Buys” on City time or property.

During his third rotation, the Apprentice decided not to stock the bin, a choice that led to noticeable consequences. His crew began taking breaks without him, leaving him isolated in the truck. Then, while awaiting his final, monthly evaluation before the next assignment, his third Crew Chief said that the Apprentice's paperwork would "fly away without a paperweight." The Apprentice took this to mean he needed to buy alcohol for the crew. He bought a bottle of alcohol for the Crew Chief and moved on to his fourth rotation, with a completed evaluation in hand.

Some Crew Chiefs allegedly made it clear that they expected Apprentices to buy them "gifts." A then-new hire reported that one Crew Chief told him that "everybody else usually buys me a bottle before I do their evaluation." The then-Apprentice asked around to make sure he got the right "gift" and learned his boss liked eight-year-old Bacardi Rum. Whether you brought a bottle or not, stated another worker, made the difference on how you were treated.

Tagged by one witness as "appropriate" drinkers, most Network employees would have a few beers at dinner before working overtime.¹¹ Another said almost everyone experienced pressure to at least do that much.¹² Certain crews, he continued, took it to a whole different level. Before overtime shifts, there was a "full fledged [sic] drinking fest," according to another witness.

Witnesses reported that crews drank beer, wine, margaritas, shots, and other hard alcohol between regular and overtime shifts.¹³ They drank mixed cocktails, vodka, whiskey, tequila, and other hard alcohol¹⁴ at the NSC dock, in their vehicles, at job sites, at substations, in vaults, and underground. The worker "topping the [man]hole" would be the designated bartender who poured drinks into little white paper cups and lowered them underground in the handline, or grunt sack, used to transport supplies.

One witness estimated that at least five work trucks were not "dry." Another remarked that certain crewmembers seldom had a "dry" night. Sometimes those who drank

¹¹ Network crews have a 30-minute unpaid break followed by on-the-clock downtime to prepare for the overtime shift.

¹² More than one witness opined that some of their coworkers have legitimate issues with alcohol and were not necessarily pressured, but needed, to drink. None of the subjects reported having an alcohol-related issue and/or seeking accommodation for a disability.

¹³ Allegedly, dinner would last longer than the allotted 30 minutes, sometimes hours longer, while crews drank.

¹⁴ Witnesses reported observing specific labels such as Jameson Irish Whiskey and Fireball Whiskey (the bottle has a devil on the label), and cocktails such as Old Fashioneds and Greyhounds.

supposedly could not function, other times they worked while impaired, and other times they ignored their duties altogether and just drank.

Some witnesses stated they had observed so much drinking over so many years that the incidents blended and are now difficult to recall with specificity. Some related what stood out in their memories as the most extreme examples, alleging:

- That a crew showed up for an overtime job after drinking at dinner. They were so drunk they didn't get anything done. They were wrestling, yelling, and causing such a commotion that a contractor working at the site asked if everything was okay.
- That, after drinking alcohol, a Cable Splicer working overtime peed on himself, couldn't talk, couldn't stand up, fell out of the truck, then passed out in the truck.
- That a Sunday overtime crew partied on hard alcohol in their truck. They were allegedly dropping tools, bungling bending conduit, and not able to function.
- That an employee worked an overtime job after drinking at dinner. He was obnoxious, burping, farting, and peeing in the vault.
- That a coworker tried to prevent another crewmember from driving and talking on the phone with the dispatcher because he was too drunk to function or talk.
- That, while "lit up," a Crew Chief on an overtime job climbed an eighteen-foot ladder to disconnect a cable.
- That another overtime crew was working in a vault while "drunk as skunks."

One witness remarked, and others agreed, that Network crews' reputations hinged on whether they drank alcohol on the job or not. Some further noted that the group's management came up through the system, allegedly continued to be part of the drinking culture, and allegedly openly disregarded City Light policy. Stated one witness, the Network was "a lonely place if you, like me, were abstinent."

2. Disrespectful, Harassing, and Other Inappropriate Behavior

Women make up less than six percent of the Network group. As a female employee, stated one witness, "we're definitely kind of already not part of the club," and the Network "breeds misogynistic attitudes." A select number of the forty subjects in this investigation were implicated in fostering this environment.

One male employee said he believed the workgroup was thirty years behind the times, stating it was "horrible" for women and he could not imagine what it must be like. Cast as an "immature" and "high school-like" environment, one witness said he observed a Crew Chief sneak up behind a female employee to scare her, chase her around a truck, pull

her hair, and say, “Hey, look,” then throw water on her face. The female employee independently reported that the Crew Chief showered her with a five-gallon bucket of ice water, what she called a “forced wet T-shirt contest” where he and anyone on the dock could see her nipples.

Various witnesses reported that one Crew Chief’s bread van had a laptop on the dashboard broadcasting porn, blasted music like Joe Walsh’s “I Like Big Tits” on the “party” truck, and the Crew Chief showed others porn on his phone. They also reported lewd jokes, sexual innuendos, commentary about women’s appearances, teasing about sex lives, and derogatory jokes about sex positions between two men.

It was commonplace, said one witness, that an otherwise nondescript construction tool (such as a drill, hammer, cable pull, lube, bitch hook, butt chisel, tongue and groove plate, nail, or screw) became the object of sexually charged banter. One example: “You ask someone to hand [you] a screwdriver... what size? ten-inch flathead screwdriver and as they pass the tool to me, I hear, ‘Oh so you like them big, don’t ya?’”

Witnesses reported that some men touched and groped women. One Crew Chief, for instance, allegedly tried to put his hands on a female employee’s thighs between her legs. Having already learned that life would get worse if she rejected or reported the behavior, she tried to block him, push him away, and laugh it off. She also would distance herself from him at job sites by trying to find a high physical point to work, where he could not reach her. She stated that he made a couple of “indecent proposals,” suggesting a relationship could lead to financial gains. Another female employee said she succumbed to a sexual encounter with the same Crew Chief, who showed up at her home uninvited. She lamented that his efforts were persistent and influential enough that she felt it unsafe to reject or anger him.

According to both male and female witnesses, some Network employees took their disrespectful, harassing behavior beyond the workplace to restaurants and the streets of downtown Seattle. At his favorite dinner spots,¹⁵ one Crew Chief allegedly grabbed and flirted with waitresses. Another Crew Chief allegedly had a female server sit on his lap while he showed her a photo of a dildo and asked if she had ever used one.

One crew was alleged to have regularly driven around town in the City Light truck, blasting music, drinking, and catcalling at female passersby. On Thursday downtown Seattle “ladies’ night,” one witness reported that the crew would beckon women to the bread van, invite them in and onto their laps, give them alcohol, and drive around for “fun and games.”

¹⁵ In this context, “dinner” refers to the 30-minute break between regular and overtime shifts.

A female witness called it, “as the sun goes down kind of behavior.” Once, a female Apprentice did not want to participate. Her Crew Chief reportedly got angry, demanding she get on the truck. She did, then jumped off, and rejoined the crew later. She said that the next day, she was cut out of overtime for the rest of the job.

One female employee stated that her male counterparts’ behavior “diminishes the value of women at work. . . I basically was on my own to try to kind of figure out how to deal with these type [sic] of situations on an ongoing basis without, you know, having myself completely ostracized and – you know, at work.” Said another, “I focused on the rationale that hazing is one of the ways you are accepted in [City Light’s] Network culture and that I wanted to be accepted so I could belong and succeed.”

B. A Happy Family

Other Network employees reported that they had never observed or participated in drinking or mistreatment of any kind. The group is “pretty special,” family-oriented, and inclusive, said one.¹⁶ Two described it as a big family where employees socialize outside of work, celebrate birthdays and weddings together, and hang out with each other’s families. Yet another said it is a positive environment where workers feel supported, heard, and safe. They like their Network jobs and coworkers.

A SPLIT WORK GROUP

A long-term Network employee dissected the Network into two workplace “camps” that don’t like each other and would probably lie. One, he stated, consists of those who don’t care, don’t put out effort, are happy to sit and let everyone else do the work, make trouble for everyone else, and never give back.¹⁷ The other camp consists of “all the good guys.” Those workers, he said, are good at their jobs, care about it, pay attention to details, are true craftspeople, and try to improve things.

Other Network employees also acknowledged there is a split workforce. They defined it as those who drink and those who don’t, or at least try not to, despite intense pressure to join in.

Those described by some as the “good guys” were subjects in this investigation. The “other camp” consists, for the most part, of employees who made allegations against the

¹⁶ This employee’s views changed when what he called “strange letters started coming out” and “outlandish” allegations were made about the Network culture.

¹⁷ Looking into poor work performance was not within the scope of my investigation and I make no comment in that regard.

“good guys.” As defined, the two “camps” have diametrically opposed views of the workplace culture.

In the middle are Network employees who claimed to have observed nothing, heard nothing, and offered no insights into the work environment. Many of those employees hesitated and appeared afraid to reveal what they may know.

ANALYSIS

While the stories varied, the themes were the same. All who came forward described a long-standing culture of drinking, pornography, and misogyny in the workplace, led by a “cabal” that ruled through pressure, intimidation, and retaliation. Most allegations were denied.

Therefore, I had to assess the credibility of each of the subjects against that of each of the witnesses who made allegations against them. In doing so, I examined factors that could reveal any insight including possible biases, consistencies and inconsistencies, and motives. I carefully looked at the available information to determine how to assign weight to conflicting evidence.

A. Witnesses Were Credible

Initially, witnesses were not forthcoming. Some remained silent, despite my probing and continued belief that they have something to say. After at least a dozen witness interviews, others reluctantly began to talk about what they had seen and heard. As they related their experiences, more than one employee wept, their voices cracking to the point they could not speak. Some were trembling and visibly apprehensive. As they named names, betraying what one called the “junior mafia,” the witnesses exhibited an evident fear.¹⁸

Certain events so impacted certain witnesses they could not forget them and were able to chronicle what transpired in minute detail. They recalled addresses, weather conditions, crewmembers, specific jobs, customer locations, and days of the week. A witness noted that one observation was “just so poignant that it kind of overshadows anything else.”

¹⁸ In concluding that witnesses feared they would be retaliated against for participating in this investigation, I noted and considered their body language and demeanor. During our meetings, many subjects also exhibited physical signs of emotion such as discomfort (e.g., red face, nervous fidgeting), disdain, and/or aggression. In my experience, those emotions could as easily be attributed to being wrongly accused as to being untruthful. For that reason, and giving the subjects every benefit of the doubt, I did not consider their demeanor, facial expressions, mannerisms, or any other body language in assessing their credibility.

By coming forward, the witnesses had little to gain and much to lose. Those who did not accept the culture reported being mistrusted, ostracized, cut out of overtime, and threatened with poor evaluations. By placing the “clique” and others in the forefront of workplace misconduct, they opened themselves up to criticism, shunning, and escalating economic repercussions.¹⁹ They subjected themselves to uncomfortable questioning and having their own behavior scrutinized. Each of them who spoke up feared they would be the only witness to do so. In attempting to finally right what they believed were culturally ingrained wrongs, the witnesses risked damaging their professional and personal reputations.

Yet, several spoke up, describing what they independently portrayed as an alcohol-ridden, harassing, coercive, and isolating Network environment.²⁰ The narratives from witness to witness were remarkably similar and consistent. The players, locations, and timeframes changed with each account. The alleged behavior did not.

B. Subjects Failed to Discredit Witnesses

Subjects variously characterized the witnesses against them as conspirators,²¹ opportunists, poor performers, unsafe workers, and/or, without any convincing support, “liars.” The question became whether the subjects’ known negative views of personalities or job performance gave witnesses motive to fabricate wrongdoing in the workplace. I found that improbable.

Witnesses recounted details so precise they would be nearly impossible to fabricate and difficult to consistently recall. When we spoke, they were not merely recounting events but reliving them in real time – beer at 2:30 in the afternoon at a University District bar called Earl’s; margaritas between shifts at Laredo’s in a pint glass that beer comes in; a

¹⁹ During this investigation, City Light has repeatedly taken measures to prevent retaliation, including conducting workgroup meetings and mandatory reporter training, making on-site counselors available to all Network employees, implementing a retaliation awareness campaign, and establishing an anti-retaliation task force.

²⁰ These witnesses initially appeared in response to City Light’s email advising of their obligation to attend an interview, cooperate, and be truthful during this investigation. As the scope of my inquiry broadened and the number of subjects multiplied, several witnesses and some subjects met with me more than once – nine times in one instance – as I sought to clarify facts, gather additional information, and/or present new allegations.

²¹ From all accounts, the alleged conspirators had and/or have limited interaction with each other. I found no evidence that any of them discussed the substance of this investigation or enjoyed a relationship with each other outside of work. Indeed, some tolerate one another, others have ceased communication, others are not particularly close. Given these facts, I found it unlikely that these Network employees -- who, at best, maintain a professional relationship -- suddenly became trusted allies to fabricate dozens of cohesive allegations and spread misinformation about their coworkers.

whiskey bottle with a picture of a devil on it in the back of the work truck; intoxicated crewmembers drinking in the work truck that was facing south in the alley near 5th and Main.

Witnesses were equally careful to point out what they did not see. More than one employee reported observing coworkers with little white cups alleged to be used for drinking alcohol on the job. They did not presume that a little white cup meant a particular employee was drinking alcohol, however, unless they knew that employee's little white cup contained alcohol.

Over several conversations, I questioned and re-questioned the witnesses, testing the consistency of their accounts each time. They were unflappable and unwavering as to what they had witnessed.²² In our many interactions during this investigation, the witnesses showed themselves to be reliable, straightforward, and discerning. Because some individuals may not care for them personally or view them as top performers does not mean the witnesses are dishonest.

Significantly, a number of witnesses openly admitted to participating in the workplace drinking culture or immediately owned up to it when questioned.²³ In doing so, they became subjects.

C. Most Subjects Were Not Credible

A handful of subjects admitted to limited wrongdoing after realizing they were subjects in the investigation, or when caught making inconsistent statements, or when pressed about their duty to tell the truth. Most, however, vehemently denied any involvement in inappropriate conduct of any kind. Some expressed disbelief at the allegations against them – including an employee who faced seventy-five serious charges, each detailed and involving recurring themes, and made by seven credible witnesses and nine anonymous complainants.

Many subjects were evasive, diverted the conversation, hesitated, contradicted themselves, and, even with repeated prodding, had difficulty getting to a simple yes or no. Some attempted to deflect from their own bad behavior by alleging wrongdoing against those who had accused them of wrongdoing.

²² This is not to suggest that witnesses did not later clarify or recall additional details triggered by interview questions.

²³ Two different subjects in this investigation confirmed that one of the witnesses does not drink alcohol. Another witness noted that they began their City Light career having been a non-drinker for several years, but found the Network to be a lonely place for those who did not drink. They started drinking again upon becoming a Journeyworker, commenting that they did it, in part, to fit in as well as to heed a Crew Chief's warning, "If I can't drink with you, I can't trust you."

Many subjects denied ever having witnessed or even having heard about any inappropriate conduct in the workplace. As the investigation progressed, their lack of awareness became increasingly suspicious, given the widespread allegations of drinking, intoxication, and harassment in the Network. Indeed, some employees who professed to never having observed anything inappropriate worked alongside others against whom I substantiated numerous, serious claims. One such coworker, a Crew Chief, was found to have been:

- Drinking and intoxicated at work sites, substations, customer locations, in restaurants between regular and overtime shifts, in City Light's work trucks, and around the streets of Seattle; and
- Disrespecting, harassing, demeaning, and assaulting female employees and female members of the public.

Moreover, among those subjects who claimed to know nothing about the oppressive workplace culture, some admitted carpooling and/or maintaining close family relationships with the Crew Chief dubbed by some as the "ringleader." One employee spent time at the Crew Chief's vacation home and went to the Crew Chief's birthday party with friends and family. Another attended the wedding of the Crew Chief's son, celebrated Christmases with him, traveled to Costa Rica with him, and watched the Super Bowl at his home. Given their close personal relationships and the Crew Chief's well-known reputation, I found it implausible that these subjects could be unaware of what was happening in the workplace.

In the end, I saw nothing to substantiate that witnesses had an incentive to make false statements. To the contrary, they had good reason to remain silent. Those who came forward corroborated the others with different, but thematic and equally troubling, stories about their coworkers' behavior at work.

On the other hand, each of the subjects had an enormous stake in the outcome of this investigation – career-wise, financially, reputationally, and personally. They had motive to falsify statements, and I believe most of them did.

With few exceptions, I found that the witnesses' versions of events to be more believable than those of the subjects.²⁴

²⁴ In two instances, I found the sole complaining witness and the subject to be equally credible. In those two situations, I gave the subjects the benefit of the doubt and found that the evidence did not support a finding of misconduct.

FINDINGS

Based upon individualized credibility assessments and a preponderance of evidence,²⁵ I generally found that partaking in a culture of drinking and sexism was required for entry into the Network's "good old boys' club." Against this backdrop, some employees found themselves outside the "clique" led by an influential "cabal." If you didn't "fall with the group," you got talked about on the dock. Drinking in the Network had been culturally normalized and, if employees did not acquiesce, they were not accepted. There was intense pressure to join in, and many wanted to fit in.²⁶

Importantly, if employees resisted or were shunned by the "brotherhood," there were economic and social consequences. Witnesses believed, for example, as I do, that certain individuals in the "brotherhood" controlled access to overtime opportunities.

Some in Network management rose through the ranks engaged in the drinking and misogynistic culture and continued to be part of it. Six of the forty subjects in this investigation were Crew Chiefs at the time of substantiated allegations.²⁷

Among them, one Crew Chief, called the "gang leader," instilled fear in those who rejected, or tried to reject, the drinking culture. He pressured one Apprentice to gift him with a bottle of alcohol in exchange for his evaluation. He accused another of being a "snitch" if he did not join in the drinking. He was heard saying multiple times, "If I can't drink with you[,] I can't trust you." Another Crew Chief, in a not-so-subtle way, let a new employee know what he expected and the consequences for not living up to his expectations -- he expected a bottle of alcohol as a "paperweight" or the Apprentice's evaluation paperwork would "fly away."

A few Crew Chiefs and Cable Splicers also wielded their power to exploit less senior female employees. Some women felt compelled to endure what one called a "hazing" environment in order to protect their City Light careers. They were subjected to unwelcomed, "high school-like," demeaning behavior and intimidation by "predator[s]" who left them feeling unsafe and powerless. Two were physically assaulted at work. One experienced uninvited intrusions into her home and personal life and was bullied into participating in conduct she felt defenseless to reject.

²⁵ In workplace investigations, the most typical standard of proof is the "preponderance of evidence." In other words, an allegation is considered proven if, based upon the facts learned and the documents reviewed, it is more likely than not that the alleged misconduct occurred.

²⁶ One witness said the drinking culture so permeated the Network that, if you must stay away from everyone who drank, you wouldn't be able to go to work.

²⁷ There may be other Crew Chiefs or management employees in this category, but many allegations lacked dates, and I was otherwise unable to verify when the substantiated incidents took place.

Coworkers' pleas to stop the harassing behavior went unheeded. One female employee learned to navigate around it by putting herself at arms-length from a Crew Chief – literally, by finding a physical work location high enough to escape his touching and groping. Another woman sometimes played along, calling it “being in the game” and being groomed to believe she would be accepted as “one of the guys.”

These female employees' reactions were understandable, given the power imbalance they encountered. One Crew Chief was not just their superior but the influential leader of the Network “clique.” Though the workplace behavior “diminish[ed]” women and put them on a “lower pedestal,” the women learned that their choices were to accept the behavior or be ostracized.

Notably, the harassment was not restricted to fellow employees but part of a pattern of “fun and games” that extended to the general public. Among other egregious behavior in which they engaged while on duty, a Crew Chief and his crew catcalled women on the downtown streets, invited them into the work truck and onto their laps, provided them with alcohol, and drove around Seattle blasting music in their “party” truck.

In substantiating approximately seventy percent of the allegations made against the forty subjects in this investigation,²⁸ my factual findings can be summarized as follows:

- There was insufficient evidence to substantiate allegations against seven subjects.
- Twenty-three subjects consumed one or more alcoholic beverages at dinner break(s) before working an overtime shift.
- Twenty subjects drank alcohol on the job.²⁹
- Thirteen subjects were intoxicated on the job.
- Three subjects engaged in inappropriate and disrespectful behavior on the job.
- Four subjects engaged in sexually-harassing behavior, including two whose behavior rose to the level of physical assault.

²⁸ It is important to note that an unsubstantiated allegation does not imply that I found the subject to be credible or that no wrongdoing occurred. With few exceptions and dependent upon the facts specific to each subject individually, I did not substantiate allegations for two main reasons: (1) I was not able to identify anonymous complainants, could not interview them to get details, and, therefore, could not give subjects the opportunity to respond; or (2) there was insufficient evidence upon which to make a finding – for example, a credible witness reported observing a subject drinking out of a little white cup but did not see alcohol being poured into that particular cup; or it was unclear whether the conduct occurred on-duty; or the allegation was based upon hearsay.

²⁹ I broadly defined the phrase “on the job” for all participants in this investigation as including observed behavior at the service center dock, work sites, substations, customer locations, in vaults, work trucks, underground, and around the streets of Seattle.

- One subject physically assaulted a coworker.
- One subject pressured coworkers and subordinates into participating in workplace drinking.
- Two subjects threatened to and/or took punitive action against those who did not participate in workplace drinking.
- One subject failed to act upon receiving a report of drinking and intoxication in the workplace.
- Two subjects engaged in other prohibited conduct.³⁰

Respectfully submitted,

/S/ Cathryn V. Dammel

³⁰ Several subjects fell into more than one of the listed categories.