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Leak of Agent's Name Causes Exposure of CIA Front Firm

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Washington Post Staff Writers
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The leak of a CIA operative's name has also exposed the identity of a CIA front company, potentially expanding the damage caused by the original disclosure, Bush administration officials said yesterday.

The company's identity, Brewster-Jennings & Associates, became public because it appeared in Federal Election Commission records on a form filled out in 1999 by Valerie Plame, the case officer at the center of the controversy, when she contributed \$1,000 to Al Gore's presidential primary campaign.

After the name of the company was broadcast yesterday, administration officials confirmed that it was a CIA front. They said the obscure and possibly defunct firm was listed as Plame's employer on her W-2 tax forms in 1999 when she was working undercover for the CIA. Plame's name was first published July 14 in a newspaper column by Robert D. Novak that quoted two senior administration officials. They were critical of her husband, former ambassador Joseph C. Wilson IV, for his handling of a CIA mission that undercut President Bush's claim that Iraq had sought uranium from the African nation of Niger for possible use in developing nuclear weapons.

The Justice Department began a formal criminal investigation of the leak Sept. 26.

The inadvertent disclosure of the name of a business affiliated with the CIA underscores the potential damage to the agency and its operatives caused by the leak of Plame's identity. Intelligence officials have said that once Plame's job as an undercover operative was revealed, other agency secrets could be unraveled and her sources might be compromised or endangered.

A former diplomat who spoke on condition of anonymity said yesterday that every foreign intelligence service would run Plame's name through its databases within hours of its publication to determine if she had visited their country and to reconstruct her activities.

"That's why the agency is so sensitive about just publishing her name," the former diplomat said.

FEC rules require donors to list their employment. Plame used her married name, Valerie E. Wilson, and listed her employment as an "analyst" with Brewster-Jennings & Associates. The document establishes that Plame has worked undercover within the past five years. The time frame is one of the standards used in making determinations about whether a disclosure is a criminal violation of the Intelligence Identities Protection Act.

It could not be learned yesterday whether other CIA operatives were associated with Brewster-Jennings.

Also yesterday, the nearly 2,000 employees of the White House were given a Tuesday deadline to scour their files and computers for any records related to Wilson or contacts with journalists about Wilson. The broad order, in an e-mail from White House counsel Alberto R. Gonzales, directed them to retain records "that relate in any way to former U.S. Ambassador Joseph C. Wilson, his trip to Niger in February 2002, or his wife's purported relationship with the Central Intelligence Agency."

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White House employees received the e-mailed directive at 12:45 p.m., with an all-capitalized subject line saying, "Important Follow-Up Message From Counsel's Office." By 5 p.m. on Tuesday, employees must turn over copies of relevant electronic records, telephone records, message slips, phone logs, computer records, memos, and diaries and calendar entries.

The directive notes that lawyers in the counsel's office are attorneys for the president in his official capacity and that they cannot provide personal legal advice to employees.

For some officials, the task is a massive one. Some White House officials said they had numerous conversations with Wilson that had nothing to do with his wife, so the directive is seen as a heavy burden at a time when many of the president's aides already feel beleaguered.

Officials at the Pentagon and State Department also have been asked to retain records related to the case. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell said yesterday: "We are doing our searches. . . . I'm not sure what they will be looking for or what they wish to contact us about, but we are anxious to be of all assistance to the inquiry."

In another development, FBI agents yesterday began attempts to interview journalists who may have had conversations with government sources about Plame and Wilson. It was not clear how many journalists had been contacted. The FBI has interviewed Plame, ABC News reported.

Wilson and his wife have hired Washington lawyer Christopher Wolf to represent them in the matter.

The couple has directed him to take a preliminary look at claims they might be able to make against people they believe have impugned their character, a source said.

The name of the CIA front company was broadcast yesterday by Novak, the syndicated journalist who originally identified Plame. Novak, highlighting Wilson's ties to Democrats, said on CNN that Wilson's "wife, the CIA employee, gave \$1,000 to Gore and she listed herself as an employee of Brewster-Jennings & Associates."

"There is no such firm, I'm convinced," he continued. "CIA people are not supposed to list themselves with fictitious firms if they're under a deep cover -- they're supposed to be real firms, or so I'm told. Sort of adds to the little mystery."

In fact, it appears the firm did exist, at least on paper. The Dun & Bradstreet database of company names lists a firm that is called both Brewster Jennings & Associates and Jennings Brewster & Associates.

The phone number in the listing is not in service, and the property manager at the address listed said there is no such company at the property, although records from 2000 were not available.

Wilson was originally listed as having given \$2,000 to Gore during the primary campaign in 1999, but the donation, over the legal limit of \$1,000, was "reattributed" so that Wilson and Plame each gave \$1,000 to Gore. Wilson also gave \$1,000 to the Bush primary campaign, but there is no donation listed from his wife.

Staff writers Dana Milbank, Susan Schmidt and Dana Priest, political researcher Brian Faler and researcher Lucy Shackelford contributed to this report.

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