

Fact Sheet

Robin Berryhill's Whistleblower Lawsuit against the Gratiot Conservation District

Robin Berryhill was fired from her job with the Gratiot Conservation District on January 10, 2002. Although her job required her to implement federal standards on non-point source pollution (pollution that originates from many sources, mainly through storm water runoff), she was fired for simply doing her job too well. Berryhill was terminated for the following actions:

- **Reporting Water Quality Violations** Robin Berryhill was instructed by her superiors to not report a number of major water quality violations to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), including the presence of cattle in a stream, a large number of dead fish floating in the water, and a recurring discharge of manure and silage leakage into Pine Creek. These instructions would have forced Ms. Berryhill to violate her obligation under the law to report violations. When she chose to follow the law, rather than the illegal orders, Berryhill reported the violations to DEQ, which took enforcement action against the violators.
- **Reporting Fiscal Mismanagement** In the fall of 2001, Berryhill discovered that the Gratiot Conservation District had been "double dipping," by receiving full payments from multiple sources for one activity. Berryhill reported the conflict to DEQ, who in turn criticized the Conservation District for their actions.
- **Working with Local Politicians** In late 2001, a Gratiot County Commissioner met with Ms. Berryhill to discuss the county's Soil Erosion program. Ms. Berryhill was instructed not to communicate with the Commissioner.

The suit states that Berryhill was fired in retaliation for her these actions in violation of the Michigan Whistleblower's Protection Act. It further contends that the Conservation District met in a closed session when they were discussing Berryhill's termination, violating the federal Open Meetings Act. Berryhill is seeking reinstatement and lost wages.