VFW Calls VA Shredding Incident A 'Disgraceful Management Failure'

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WASHINGTON — The national commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is calling this morning's disclosure that some veterans' documents may have been shredded a "disgraceful management failure."

In a conference call with veterans' service organizations, the Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledged that 10 or more pieces of documents were discovered in shredder bins at four VA Regional Offices in Detroit, St. Louis, St. Petersburg, Fla., and Waco, Texas. What is especially disturbing to VFW national commander Glen Gardner is how widespread the problem could be.

"The VA has 57 regional offices," he explained. "The VA Inspector General conducted a routine investigation of Detroit's mailroom and discovered five documents in the shredder bin, then three pieces are found in St. Louis, two in Waco, and some more in St. Petersburg. With almost 850,000 VA claims in the backlog, the question that begs to be asked and answered is how many veterans had their disability and compensation claims disappear down a paper shredder?"

The VA said all offices have now been instructed to halt all shredding, and for supervisors to secure and personally review all documents currently in shredder bins. Supervisors will also remove portable shredders from all personal workspaces.

"We have to believe that the VA will right this wrong," said Gardner, a Vietnam veteran from Round Rock, Texas, "but the VA must also establish the internal controls to ensure no other acts of willful destruction will ever happen again, and then to enforce those rules."

The VFW national commander wants VA Secretary James B. Peake to hold people accountable for their actions or inactions.

"Secretary Peake must hold everyone involved personally accountable for this disgraceful management failure," he said. "Someone who intentionally destroys paperwork, or supervisors who allow employees to interpret their own rules, are people who are doing serious damage to a great public image that took the VA years to build. Our veterans and our

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nation deserve much better."