

Fired For Sending E-mail

More Employers Are Reading E-mails, To Workers' Surprise

By Tatiana Morales / *The Early Show*

It's hard to imagine what we all did before e-mail. A recent estimate says 200 million of us will send more than 10 billion e-mails this year, most from the office. But what if we told you that not only does your company or school have the right to monitor your emails, a full 60 percent of them do it?

Many of us have done it: received a joke, recipe or musing from a friend or coworker via e-mail.

Maybe you read it and hit delete. Maybe you forwarded it along to someone else.

Imagine being fired for such a thing. It's happening more and more often. In fact, two New Jersey women have discovered this hard fact through firsthand experience.

Heidi Arace and Norma Yetsko, both longtime employees with PNC Bank, were fired after forwarding jokes on their company's e-mail.

"I was shocked and so hurt that I don't even know how to put it into words to you," says Yetsko.

Arace says, "I was cold. I was frozen. It was like I lost everything in my life. You get a simple e-mail like this, you read it; you chuckle; forward it on, click. Done deal. You don't think of the policy, because everyone was doing it."

One of Arace's e-mails was a picture of a topless woman with Hillary Clinton's head superimposed.

Attorney Patricia Barasch represents Arace and Yetsko in a lawsuit against PNC Bank, alleging wrongful termination.

"What happened here was that the bank completely sandbagged Heidi and Norma, completely," Barasch says. "They had a policy in place that said you weren't supposed to use the company e-mail system to send personal e-mails. But they did not enforce it. So, as far as I'm concerned, the policy wasn't worth the paper it was written on."

According to Arace and Yetsko, jokes and chain letters like these were regularly circulated among bank employees.

Yetsko's intention regarding a particular e-mail she forwarded was to get a laugh out of it, which is what she got when she received it. Instead, she says, "I got fired."

In a written response, PNC Bank stands by the firings, saying, "The internal distribution of offensive material is a clear violation of our Code of Ethics." A company spokesman added, "Other employees who did the same thing in terms of the type and number of e-mails were terminated" in accordance with PNC's policy.



Heidi Arace and Norma Yetsko were fired because of e-mails they forwarded.