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1 of 12



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Medical Journal Rebukes Researcher

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By DAVID ARMSTRONG

Updated Sept. 12, 2008 12:01 a.m. ET

The Ear & Hearing journal has rebuked a Washington University researcher for failing to disclose that he was working as a paid expert for a siren manufacturer when he published a study saying firefighters weren't at risk for job-related hearing loss.

The journal chastises William W. Clark, a hearing scientist at the university's medical school in St. Louis, in a lengthy editorial note. Such rebukes are unusual in medical journals but signal a growing concern with ensuring that researchers fully disclose any potential conflicts of interest.

Dr. Clark's ties to the siren company, [Federal Signal Corp.](#), were detailed in a front-page article in The Wall Street Journal in June 2007. (See previous article on [William W. Clark](#))

Dr. Clark had reported to the medical journal that he "has provided consulting services for manufacturers of emergency firefighting equipment." He didn't disclose that he was a paid expert helping Federal Signal defend itself from lawsuits by firefighters with hearing problems. Federal Signal told a court that the study by Dr. Clark "directly refutes plaintiffs' argument that siren noise exposure causes hearing loss in firefighters."

Dr. Clark, in a letter accompanying the editors' note, said he did nothing wrong and "fully met the requirements of the journal at the time of submission in 2004." The study was published in 2005.

The editors, however, said his disclosure was "incomplete and misleading." They said Dr. Clark's specific work for Federal Signal, of Oak Brook, Ill., should have been disclosed.

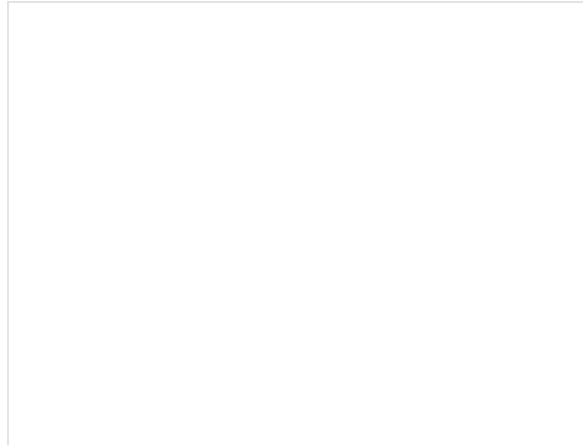
In addition, the editors said Dr. Clark should have disclosed that the company and a law firm defending it in the firefighter cases helped with his research.

Federal Signal gathered data from fire departments for Dr. Clark, according to court records. Dr. Clark said in a deposition that he welcomed the company's help because he "did not have the time, or the energy, or the resources to try and talk every fire company in the country into participating in a study."

Dr. Clark also has said in an interview that he had suggested to Federal Signal that it hire Thomas Jayne, a lawyer he had worked with on previous cases, to defend the firm against lawsuits from firefighters. Invoices show that from 2000 through at least 2004, Mr. Jayne and Dr. Clark frequently discussed the hearing study in progress. In August and September 2003, Mr. Jayne billed Federal Signal for eight sessions with Dr. Clark. Several invoices indicate the lawyer was reviewing a draft of Dr. Clark's proposed research article. In 2004, Mr. Jayne billed for time to "review comments of reviews re Clark article," according to one invoice.

Mr. Jayne couldn't be reached to comment Thursday.

Write to David Armstrong at david.armstrong@wsj.com



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- WSJ Weekend
- Contact Directory
- Corrections

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- Cookie Policy
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- Copyright Policy
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- Place a Classified Ad
- Sell Your Home
- Sell Your Business
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- Franchising
- Advertise Locally

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- Apps
- Emails & Alerts
- Graphics & Photos
- Columns
- Topics
- Guides
- Portfolio
- Old Portfolio

More

- Reprints
- Content Partnerships
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- Price & Volume
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