Consider the following example of an ethical dilemma:

Mil-Tech Manufacturing Company is a Department of Defense contractor that produces air and watertight aluminum containers for shipping nonnuclear munitions such as missiles, bombs, and torpedoes. Business has been good and Mil-Tech is prospering. However, the company’s management team has a problem.

Mil-Tech has been awarded a contract to produce 10,000 boxes in six months. The company’s maximum capacity is currently 1,000 boxes per month. Unless Mil-Tech can find a way to increase its capacity, the company will be forced to add new facilities, equipment, and personnel—an expensive undertaking that will quickly eat up the projected profits of the new contract.

The most time-consuming bottleneck in the production of the boxes is the painting process, the last step. The problem is with the paint that Mil-Tech uses. It poses no health, safety, or environmental hazards, but it is difficult to apply and requires at least two hours to dry. Clearly, the most expeditious way to increase productivity is to find a paint that is easier to apply and takes less time to dry.

The production manager has been searching frantically for a substitute paint for two weeks and has finally found one. The new paint is easy to apply, and it dries almost on contact. However, it is extremely toxic and can be dangerous to anyone exposed to it at any time before it dries. Personal protective equipment (PPE) and other hazard-prevention techniques can minimize the health problems, but they must be used properly with absolutely no shortcuts. In addition, it is recommended that every employee who will work with the paint complete three full days of training.

Mil-Tech’s management team is convinced that the union will not consent to the use of this paint even if the PPE is purchased and the training is provided. To complicate matters, the supplier of the paint cannot provide the training within a time frame that meets Mil-Tech’s needs. In a secret meeting, top management officials decide to purchase PPE, use the new paint, and forgo the training. More importantly, the management team decides to withhold all information about the hazards associated with the new paint.

Camillo Garcia, Mil-Tech’s safety and health manager, was not invited to the secret meeting. However, the decisions made during the meeting were slipped to him anonymously. Garcia now faces an ethical dilemma. What should he do? If he chooses to do nothing, Mil-Tech employees may be inappropriately exposed to an extremely hazardous substance. If he confronts the management team with what he knows, he could fall into disfavor or even lose his job. If he shares what he knows with union leaders, he may be called on to testify about what he knows.