



# Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas

Kenneth Magidson • United States Attorney

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Two University of Houston Professors Indicted**

HOUSTON – Two professors at the University of Houston have been charged with making false statements and wire fraud in connection obtaining federal funds for research grants, announced United States Attorney Kenneth Magidson.

Abdelhak Bensaoula, Ph.D., 57, and David Starikov, Ph.D, 58, both of Houston, surrendered to federal authorities this morning. They are expected to make their initial appearances before U.S. Magistrate Judge Nancy Johnson at 2:00 p.m.

The 29-count indictment, returned April 24, 2014, alleges one count of conspiracy, seven counts of making false statements and 21 counts of wire fraud, all in connection with the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program.

According to the indictment, both defendants are professors in the Physics Department at the University of Houston and are affiliated with The Nitride Group. They allegedly started a small business known as Integrated Micro Sensors Inc. (IMS) which applied for and received SBIR grants or contracts from NASA, National Science Foundation, Department of Energy and the United States Air Force.

The indictment further alleges Bensaoula and Starikov made false statements in the application and proposal process and in filing electronic claims for payment after they were awarded grants or contracts. On behalf of IMS, they both allegedly used false and fraudulent letters of support and made false representations with regards to facilities, equipment and materials. Additionally, the indictment alleges the defendants stated in proposals that IMS would pay a required subcontract fee to the University of Houston, which it failed to pay on four of five contracts. Bensaoula and Starikov, through IMS, also allegedly applied for and received at least 25 SBIR grants between 2000 and 2013. From 2008 through 2013, the defendants and IMS allegedly received at least five SBIR contracts for approximately \$1.3 million.

The defendants allegedly attempted to hide their scheme from detection from the government and university officials.

If convicted of the conspiracy, both face up to a five-year prison term as well as another five years upon each conviction of making false statements. For the wire fraud charges, the defendants face up to 20 years for each conviction. All charges also carry as possible punishment a \$250,000 fine.

The investigation of this case has been conducted by the NASA - Office of Inspector General, National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. Air Force, Defense Criminal Investigative Service and the Defense Contract Audit Agency with the assistance and cooperation of the University of Houston. Assistant United States Attorney Cedric L. Joubert is prosecuting.

***An indictment is a formal accusation of criminal conduct, not evidence.  
A defendant is presumed innocent unless convicted through due process of law.***