



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Department of Toxic Substances Control

News Release

T - 18 - 14

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 20, 2014

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Plating Shop Operators Plead to Felony and Misdemeanor Charges

SACRAMENTO – Operators of an illegal plating operation in Merced County have pleaded no-contest to criminal charges related to the release and abandonment of hazardous waste, the Department of Toxic Substances Control’s (DTSC) Office of Criminal Investigations (OCI) announced today.

On June 17, Bonnie Rita Cardenas pleaded no contest to a misdemeanor violation for failure to immediately report the release of muriatic acid (also known as hydrochloric acid). The terms of Cardenas’s plea include 50 hours of community service, three years of informal probation, reserved restitution, fines, and fees. On July 29, Ramon Alonzo Montes pleaded no contest to a felony violation for unlawfully dumping hazardous waste. The terms of Montes’s plea include 120 days in jail, five years informal probation, and reserved restitution, fines, and fees.

Montes formerly operated a plating facility located at 19770 Bloss Avenue in Hilmar. He ceased paying rent for the facility and abandoned hazardous materials there. Montes subsequently sold his remaining plating chemicals to Cardenas. In moving those chemicals from Montes’s Hilmar facility to a facility located at 1851 Grogan Avenue in Merced, a 55-gallon drum of muriatic acid spilled onto the ground and ultimately entered a storm drain. Cardenas failed to report the release.

OCI coordinated with the California Highway Patrol and Merced County Environmental Health Department in the investigation. OCI referred the matter to the Merced County District Attorney, which then filed a criminal complaint against Cardenas and Montes for violations of the California Penal Code and the California Hazardous Waste Control Law.

“Illegal disposal of hazardous wastes threaten the safety of the community”, said Enrique Baeza, a supervising criminal investigator for DTSC. “Criminal charges were warranted for this reckless misconduct and we are grateful for the convictions obtained by the District Attorney’s Office.”

OCI is a special investigation unit within DTSC consisting of peace officers, scientists, and a computer forensic specialist who investigate criminal misconduct and other serious violations of hazardous waste laws in California. It is the only criminal investigation unit within the California Environmental Protection Agency and is part of Legal Affairs.



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FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES: Contact the Department of Toxic Substances Control by phone at (800) 728-6942 or visit www.dtsc.ca.gov. To report illegal handling, discharge, or disposal of hazardous waste, call the Waste Alert Hotline at (800) 698-6942.

The Mission of DTSC is to protect California's people and environment from harmful effects of toxic substances by restoring contaminated properties, identifying and promoting safer ingredients in consumer products, and ensuring stewardship through enforcement, regulation and pollution prevention.