



Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2008
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ENRD
(202) 514-2007
TDD (202) 514-1888

Virgin Islands Man Sentenced to Prison for Illegal Removal of Asbestos

WASHINGTON – Cleve Allen George, the owner of the Virgin Islands Asbestos Removal, Co., was sentenced today to 33 months in prison for multiple violations of the Clean Air Act and false statements related to the demolition of a low-income housing neighborhood in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Justice Department announced today.

George and co-defendant Dylan C. Starnes, of Atlanta, Ga. were both convicted after a two-week trial on June 30, 2005, on 15 counts involving the illegal removal of asbestos-containing material at the Donoe Housing Community (DHC) Project in 2001 and making materially false statements to federal agencies concerning air monitoring at the project. George was also sentenced today to 3 years of supervised release and required to pay for baseline X-rays for exposed workers.

Starnes, the former president of Environmental Contracting Company (ECC) and a licensed and certified asbestos contractor/supervisor, was sentenced on July 27, 2007 to 33 months in prison and three years of supervised release.

“Both George and Starnes were knowledgeable of how to safely remove asbestos and chose ignore those safe methods in lieu of a bigger profit,” said Ronald J. Tenpas, Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division. “These sentences should serve as a warning to those in the industry that profiting at the expense of the community will not pay off and disregarding these safe removal methods will have serious consequences.”

“Exposure to asbestos can cause serious or even fatal respiratory diseases,” said William Lometti, Special Agent in Charge of EPA Criminal Investigation Division’s New York Area Office. “The defendant’s criminal acts put the public at risk. Today’s sentence shows that we take this seriously, and will prosecute others who violate environmental laws.”

The DHC, a low-income public residential community located on St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, was owned by the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA). George and Starnes were hired as contractors by the VIHA to remove asbestos in an old building scheduled for demolition.

The evidence at trial established that the defendants, who filed a work plan indicating that they would follow all applicable regulations regarding asbestos removal, did not follow the asbestos work practice regulations, in violation of federal law. The defendants were convicted of using a power washer to strip thousands of square feet of asbestos-containing material from ceilings. The asbestos material then washed out over the ground and into sewers.

According to the EPA, exposure to airborne asbestos may result in a potential health risk. Continued exposure can increase the amount of fibers that remain in the lung. Fibers embedded in lung tissue over

time may cause serious lung diseases including: asbestosis, lung cancer, or mesothelioma.

This case was investigated by EPA Criminal Investigation Division agents and OSHA agents, and is being prosecuted by the Justice Department's Stacey Mitchell, Chief of the Environmental Crimes Section, Joseph Poux, Trial Attorney with the Environmental Crimes Section, and Major Coleman, Assistant U.S. Attorney with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of the Virgin Islands.

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