

NEWS

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Clifton Man Sentenced to Two Years for Tampering with PSE&G
Meters, Taking Cash Payments from Electric Customers

(More)

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CAMDEN – A Clifton man was sentenced today to 24 months in federal prison for tampering with power meters at residences and businesses and causing an electric utility to undercharge customers more than \$2 million, Acting U.S. Attorney Ralph J. Marra, Jr. announced.

U.S. District Judge Noel L. Hillman also ordered Luis Rodriguez, 38, to pay \$357,918 in restitution. Judge Hillman ordered him to surrender to the federal Bureau of Prisons by June 1 to begin serving his sentence.

Rodriguez pleaded guilty on Nov. 18, 2008, to a one-count Information. During the course of the criminal conduct Rodriguez lived in Clifton and tampered with meters in and around Paterson.

At his plea hearing, Rodriguez admitted that from February 1998 to February 2006 he represented himself to be a licensed electrician when in fact he was not. He further admitted that he offered his services to PSE&G customers to tamper with their PSE&G meters so that they could reduce their electricity bills. Rodriguez admitted that he took cash payments from the PSE&G customers in return for tampering with the meters and lowering their bills.

To tamper with the meters, Rodriguez purchased special tools and removed anti-tampering tags on the PSE&G meters. Rodriguez admitted that after he tampered with the meters, he attempted to restore the anti-tampering tags back to the meters.

The plea agreement set forth a loss amount to PSE&G of between \$1 million and \$2.5 million. At sentencing, Judge Hillman read a letter from PSE&G identifying losses of \$357,918 representing 142 tampered meters, as well as \$1.6 million of collectibles still outstanding. Judge Hillman stressed the need for a “strong deterrent message” prior to announcing the 24-month sentence.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Hillman consulted the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant’s criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, was not bound by those guidelines in determining the sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Marra credited Special Agents of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, under the direction of Postal Inspector in Charge David L. Collins, for the investigation of Rodriguez.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Erez Liebermann of the U.S. Attorney’s Office Commercial Crime unit in Newark.

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Rodriguez was represented by Linda Foster, of the United States Federal Public Defender.