



Department of Justice

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GEORGIA COMPANY CHARGED WITH BID RIGGING ON WASTEWATER TREATMENT FACILITY PROJECTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- The Department of Justice today charged a Georgia wastewater treatment company with conspiring to rig bids on the sale of wastewater treatment equipment and other materials and related services for use in various Alabama and Georgia wastewater treatment plants.

The one-count felony case, filed in U.S. District Court in Atlanta, charges Steele-Nickles & Associates Inc. of Marietta, Georgia, with participating in a conspiracy to suppress and eliminate competition by rigging bids in violation of the Sherman Act. Steele-Nickles participated in the conspiracy at least as early as 1995 and continued until October 1998.

According to the charge, Steele-Nickles and its co-conspirators carried out the conspiracy by deciding who would be the low bidder and submitting, or causing to be submitted, collusive and rigged bids on contracts for the sale of wastewater treatment materials to be used on two wastewater treatment projects--the City of Hawkinsville, Georgia, and Trussville Wastewater Treatment Plant, Jefferson County, Alabama. Steele-Nickles and its co-conspirators also discussed and agreed to submit collusive and rigged bids on a third project, the Water, Light and Sinking Fund Commission of the City of Dalton, Georgia, which ultimately involved construction improvements to the Loopers Bend Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Today's charge is the third to arise out of an ongoing investigation in Atlanta of the water and wastewater treatment equipment industry being conducted jointly by the Justice Department's Antitrust Division, Atlanta Field Office, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

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Steele-Nickles is charged with violating Section 1 of the Sherman Act which carries a maximum fine of \$10 million for a corporation. The maximum fine may be increased to twice the gain derived from the crime or twice the loss suffered by the victims of the crime, if either of those amounts is greater than the statutory maximum fine.

Anyone with information concerning bid rigging in the water and wastewater treatment equipment industry should contact the Atlanta Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation at (404) 331-7108.

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