



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, March 18, 2011
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OWNER OF RENOVATED DES MOINES, IOWA BUILDING PLEADS GUILTY TO ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES

Workers Improperly Removed and Disposed of Asbestos

DES MOINES, IA – The owner of the Equitable Building in Des Moines, Iowa, pleaded guilty today in federal court in Des Moines to conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act and to violating the Clean Air Act's work practice standards related to asbestos removal, the Justice Department announced.

Bob Knapp, 61, of Des Moines, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge James E. Gritzner to one count of conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act and one count of failing to remove all regulated asbestos containing material from the Equitable Building before commencement of the renovation project that occurred at the building from 2005 until 2008.

The Clean Air Act requires that owners of public buildings that contain asbestos follow federally-established work practice standards to ensure the safe removal of the asbestos. The required standards include providing notice to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) before commencing asbestos removal, adequately wetting the asbestos during the removal and before disposal, and properly disposing of the asbestos at an EPA-approved disposal site.

According to a plea agreement filed with the court, from 2006 through February 2008, Mr. Knapp oversaw the renovation project which involved converting several floors in the Equitable Building into luxury residential condominium units, and renovating other floors to attract additional commercial tenants.

Mr. Knapp admitted that he conspired with Russell Coco, who was also charged and pleaded guilty to the same counts on February 15, 2011, to remove asbestos containing materials from the Equitable Building without complying with the requirements of the Clean Air Act. While Mr. Knapp was overseeing the project, asbestos containing material was removed from the building and disposed of in an uncovered dumpster.

According to the plea agreement, Mr. Knapp has agreed that the characteristics of his offenses put his potential prison sentence in the 33 to 41 month range, and under the law, he may be subject to a fine of up to \$250,000. A sentencing date has been set for June 10, 2011.

“Our environment is important, and we take criminal violations of the laws protecting it seriously,” said U.S. Attorney Nick Klinefeldt. Mr. Knapp put peoples’ lives in danger with his actions here, and he now he is going to be held accountable for those actions. The investigation was conducted by the EPA Criminal Investigation Division. The case is being prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Iowa together with the Justice Department’s Environmental Crimes Section of the Environment and Natural Resources Division.

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