



Department of Justice

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Middle District of Florida

Tampa

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LAKELAND MAN WHO TARGETED LAW ENFORCEMENT HELICOPTER WITH POWERFUL GREEN LASER PLEADS GUILTY

Tampa, Florida - United States Attorney Robert E. O'Neill announces that Mark Clay Hazlitt (58, Lakeland) pleaded guilty today to interference with the operation of an aircraft. Hazlitt faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in federal prison. His sentencing is set for June 2, 2011 at 8:30 a.m. before United States District Judge Steven D. Merryday.

According to court documents, on November 21, 2010, Hazlitt pointed a green laser beam at a Polk County Sheriff's Office helicopter. He pointed the laser at the helicopter no fewer than four times causing the tactical flight officer's night vision goggles to shut down and causing disorientation inside the aircraft. The pilots were able to keep the helicopter in the air and identify the source of the laser.

This case was investigated by Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Polk County Sheriff's Office. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Lisset G. Hanewicz.