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**LAFAYETTE DRY CLEANING BUSINESS OWNER PLEADS  
GUILTY TO NEGLIGENTLY DISCHARGING  
HAZARDOUS WASTE INTO SEWER**

**Lafayette, La.:** United States Attorney Stephanie A. Finley announced that Jason Prejean, 38, of Lafayette, La., entered a guilty plea on Tuesday afternoon in federal court on behalf of himself and One Low Price Cleaners (OLPC), stemming from violations of a local pre-treatment program. Prejean and OLPC were charged with negligently causing and allowing the discharge of hazardous waste into a publicly owned treatment works or sewer system. Prejean is the owner of OLPC, a dry cleaning business located on Willow Street in Lafayette.

At the guilty plea hearing, Prejean admitted that he acted negligently in failing to ensure the proper and lawful disposal of waste waters containing PERC and that he failed to train OLPC employees on the proper and lawful disposal of PERC waste. Tetrachloroethylene, also referred to as perchloroethylene and PERC, is a federally listed hazardous waste and is a commonly used chemical in dry cleaning. Dry cleaners are required by law to contract with a permitted hazardous waste company to dispose of the PERC lawfully. Prejean also admitted that he had not used a disposal company since February of 2007. Investigations conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Criminal Investigation Division and Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), revealed that from December of 2007 through May of 2009, PERC was being improperly stored on-site at OLPC and routinely, employees poured PERC wastewaters down the toilet inside the store. Due to misrepresentations by an OLPC employee, agents did not discover that employees had been storing PERC in unapproved Rubbermaid containers until May 28, 2009, the second day of the emergency response to detect and determine the source of the hazardous fumes.

During emergency response and investigation on May 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of 2009, citizens and employees of adjacent businesses were evacuated, and some were medically treated due to reported symptoms from the exposure of PERC fumes. Traces of the hazardous substance, PERC, were located in adjacent businesses due to the fact that OLPC shared a common sewer system with these businesses. Test results also revealed the presence of PERC at the junction in which sewer waters from OLPC enters the city sewer system.

Prejean violated an approved local pre-treatment program maintained by Lafayette Utility System (LUS). LUS requires all users of the sewer system to obtain a permit to discharge industrial wastes into their publicly owned treatment works. OLPC was never issued a permit to discharge any amounts of PERC into the sewer system.

U. S. Attorney Stephanie Finley stated: "Environmental laws are essential to the health, safety and welfare of our citizens, businesses and community. Violations of these laws can and do cause physical harm to our citizens, as well as damage to property and the environment. We are committed to ensuring that the citizens of our community are not exposed to such dangerous substances because of the negligent actions of those who just don't care about the harm they cause to the environment. Our office will continue to prosecute these types of cases. Individuals and businesses who deal with hazardous substances must fully comply with the law so that this doesn't happen again. "

Special Agent in Charge of EPA's Criminal Enforcement Division in Louisiana, Ivan Vikin, stated, "There are honest accidents and then there are crimes. Tetrachloroethylene, often known as "perc," is a toxic chemical that can cause headaches, nausea and unconsciousness. Exposure to very high concentrations can result in death. The defendant negligently dumped perc into the city sewer system for up to two years. Today's guilty plea shows that anyone who deliberately puts public health and the environment at risk will be prosecuted."

Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Peggy Hatch, said, "It is unfortunate that a few business owners choose to conduct operations that violate the law at the expense of human health and the environment. The willful discharge of a hazardous material into a public sewer system is a serious offense that will be met with serious consequences and prosecution to the fullest extent of the law. LDEQ continues to work with the public as well as local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in order to investigate and bring such violators to justice."

The case was investigated by the Louisiana Environmental Crimes Task Force, which is comprised of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality's Criminal Investigation Division and the Louisiana State Police. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Myers P. Namie.

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