



The United States Attorney's Office

Southern District of Iowa

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER OF DES MOINES BUILDING RENOVATION PLEADS GUILTY TO ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES

Workers Improperly Removed and Disposed of Asbestos

DES MOINES, IA—On February 15, 2011, the construction manager for a renovation project at The Equitable Building in Iowa, pleaded guilty in federal court in Des Moines to conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act and for violating the Clean Air Act's work practice standards related to asbestos removal, announced United States Attorney Nicholas A. Klinefeldt. Russell Coco pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge James E. Gritzner for the Southern District of Iowa to one count of conspiracy to violate the Clean Air Act and one count of failing remove all regulated asbestos containing material from The Equitable Building before commencement of the renovation project.

The Clean Air Act requires contractors who remove asbestos from public buildings to 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. Coco acted as the construction manager for 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. Coco admitted that he conspired with Bob Knapp, who is also charged and is scheduled to be tried on February 28, to remove asbestos containing materials from the Equitable Building without complying with the requirements of the Clean Air Act. While Mr. Coco was the construction manager for the project, asbestos containing material was removed from the building and disposed of in an uncovered dumpster.

According to the plea agreement, Coco has agreed to face up to 12 months in prison and, under the law, is subject to a fine of up to \$250,000. A sentencing date has been set for May 20, 2011, at 9:00am.

The investigation was conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Investigation Division. The case is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Iowa together with the Justice Department's Environmental Crimes Section.