



The United States Attorney's Office

## Eastern District of Louisiana

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### Press Releases

#### TEXAS PETROLEUM INVESTMENT COMPANY IS SENTENCED TODAY FOR MISDEMEANOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

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January 21, 2009

##### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TEXAS PETROLEUM INVESTMENT COMPANY (TPIC)**, an oil production company headquartered in Houston, Texas, was sentenced in federal court today by U. S. Magistrate Judge Daniel Knowles to two years probation for violating the Clean Water Act by causing a negligent spill of processed brine water into waters of the United States on a federal wildlife refuge, announced U. S. Attorney Jim Letten.

Additionally, **TPIC** was ordered to pay \$425,000 to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the benefit of the Delta National Wildlife Refuge and the Atchafalaya National Wildlife Refuge for the purpose of protecting wildlife, fisheries and habitat, the monitoring of oil and gas facilities and operations, and supporting law enforcement, \$25,000 to the Louisiana State Police Right to Know Fund, which money pays for, among other things, State Police first responders' equipment and the Louisiana State Police hot line, and \$25,000 to the Southern Environmental Enforcement Network Enforcement Training Fund, which money pays for environmental training to all law enforcement. **TPIC** was also fined \$50,000.

**TPIC** was charged by Bill of Information on August 5, 2008 and entered a guilty plea on October 29, 2008 admitting that it operated an the Romere Pass oil production facility located on federal lands within the confines of the in the Delta National Wildlife Refuge, approximately eight miles east north east of Venice, Louisiana. The Romere Pass Facility was used for the collection, separation and treating of oil and gas produced from nearby **TPIC** wells located in the Romere Pass Field. The main function of the employees at the Romere Pass Facility was to ensure that the wells were producing and that the systems were monitored for safety reasons. The wells produced oil and water which were pumped to the Facility. The oil and water were passed through a series of separators which would separate the oil from the water. The oil would be sent off to be recorded and loaded to a barge for sale. The water went into a tank to be reprocessed through another separator and then ultimately into an injection well for disposal.

At the Facility was a water storage tank where processed water was stored prior to being sent to the injection wells. On or around March 17, 2005, the water storage tank's alarm sounded because the water level was high in the storage tank. The employees became aware that a salt water injection well was not working and the pumps could not keep up. Consequently, oil and water began to spill over the top of the tank. The employees used a bypass valve to release processed brine water over the side of the barge into the water until the pumps could catch up. Since the date of the negligent spill, **TPIC** has corrected the injection well problem.

Investigation Division, stated

"The company allowed a sensitive environmental area to be used as a dumping ground for salt water, rather than ensuring that it was disposed of lawfully. It is appropriate that, in addition to the criminal fine, the company will be required to fund programs to ensure compliance with laws that protect the two wildlife refuges."

Damon Rodriguez, Special Agent-in-Charge, Coast Guard Investigative Service, Gulf Coast Region, said

"The Coast Guard Investigative Service will continue to vigorously investigate those companies that pollute the environment and weaken the ecosystem."

This case was investigated by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency and the United States Coast Guard Criminal Investigative Service and was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Dorothy Manning Taylor.