

Hanford contractors to pay \$125M settlement

SEATTLE (AP) — Bechtel National Inc. and a subcontractor have agreed to pay \$125 million to settle a lawsuit alleging subpar work in building a nuclear waste treatment facility on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state...



Bob Brawdy/The Tri-City Herald via AP, File

In this 2010 file photo, Bechtel manager Scott Neubauer, left, answers questions from Daniel Poneman, deputy secretary of energy, during his tour Hanford's Waste Treatment Plant in Richland, Wash. Federal prosecutors say Bechtel National Inc. and a subcontractor have agreed to pay \$125 million to settle a lawsuit alleging subpar work in the construction of a nuclear waste treatment facility on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

Attorney Michael Ormsby, which he called "deeply concerning given the obvious importance of nuclear safety" at the plant.

"The money allocated by Congress for the Waste Treatment Plant is intended to fund the Department of Energy's important mission to clean up the contaminated Hanford nuclear site, and this mission is undermined if funds are wasted on goods or services that are not nuclear compliant or to further lobbying activities," Benjamin C. Mizer, the head of the Justice Department's Civil Division, said in a news release.

The settlement also resolves accusations Bechtel, a giant engineering and construction company, illegally used taxpayer

dollars to fund a multiyear lobbying campaign. Bechtel paid lobbyists to downplay to members of Congress the significance of concerns raised by an independent federal oversight board, prosecutors said.

The companies denied any wrongdoing in the settlement.

"We have performed our work at the WTP project ethically and professionally," Bechtel spokesman Fred deSousa said in an emailed statement. "A protracted legal proceeding and the distraction of a trial are not in the best interest of the WTP project. Instead, we will focus on continuing to work in collaboration with the Department of Energy to solve the most challenging

and complex radioactive waste problem in U.S. history."

Bechtel will pay \$67.5 million to the federal government, while URS will pay \$57.5 million of the settlement. For bringing the suit, the whistleblowers, who said they were retaliated against or even fired for raising safety concerns, are entitled to keep 15 to 25 percent of the total payout, said Joe Harrington, a spokesman for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Hanford, located in south-central Washington state, for decades made plutonium for nuclear weapons. The site is now engaged in cleaning up the nation's largest collection of nuclear waste.

Tom Carpenter, executive director of the watchdog group Hanford Challenge, called the settlement "justice being served."

"This is a company that probably should not be working for the government," he said. "It started by harassing and silencing whistleblowers, and when they brought their information public, it caused the work at the plant to be suspended."

"We still don't have a design for the waste treatment plant after the whistleblowers pointed out the nuclear safety deficiencies in the design," he added. "We want the plant to work, but there's little point in having a waste treatment plant if it's subject to explosion."

Bechtel was awarded the contract to design and build the Waste Treatment Plant in 2000.

Man sentenced after woman shot in head with nailgun

EUGENE (AP) — A former firefighter who authorities say shot nine 3-inch nails into the back of a woman's head in a botched suicide pact in Oregon has been sentenced to two years in state prison after accepting a plea deal.

Troy Vance Thompson pleaded guilty Tuesday to attempted second-degree manslaughter after accepting a deal that allowed him to avoid a possible maximum sentence of more than seven years in custody, the Register-Guard reported.

The 31-year-old woman from Eugene survived but suffered permanent brain damage from the nails.

"I'm very sorry about how it turned out," Thompson said in court. "I wish we could've done something a little bit different. We had no idea it was going to be a halfway thing, or we wouldn't have done it."

Thompson, 47, of Creswell told authorities he first met the woman the day before the incident when she stopped her car on Highway 99 in Eugene and approached him while he walked along the road, according to a search warrant affidavit filed in the case in June. She told Thompson she needed someone to kill her because she didn't want to be committed to a mental hospital.

The woman eventually said she would rent a gas-powered nail gun and meet Thompson in the woods to carry out a suicide pact.

Thompson told police he fired three nails from the gun into the back of the woman's head but then stopped. The woman "was still alive and told him to keep going (and) reminded Troy he had promised her he would help her," according to court papers filed earlier in the case.

He then six more nails into her skull and then put one in his own head before passing out, the documents state.

The woman's mother has told authorities that her daughter has bipolar disorder and had stopped taking her medication about three weeks before the incident, the newspaper reported. Thompson also told police that he had previous brain injuries, a history of substance abuse and suicidal thoughts, according to court papers.

The victim's mother appeared at the court hearing but declined to comment.

Lane County Circuit Court Judge Mustafa Kasubhai said that although the incident itself was unfortunate, "the underlying tragedy beyond that is that in our community, people with mental health conditions find themselves so alone that (suicide) becomes the only viable alternative."

Thompson will serve three years of probation upon his release from prison.

If he violates probation, he will be sentenced to another three years and four months behind bars, according to the agreement.



Thompson

BRIEFLY

State agencies warn pot growers of pesticide use

BEND (AP) — State agencies are reminding marijuana producers to limit their use of pesticides in the wake of two recent public health alerts.

The Bend Bulletin reports that a letter from three state agencies warns that cannabis producers whose products test below "action levels" for permitted pesticides may still be violating state regulations if they use pesticides banned by the state Pesticide Control Act.

An action level is a low pesticide measure that the authority requires of

testing laboratories as a measure of accuracy. Action levels do not indicate a safe level.

The letter, co-signed Monday by the heads of the Health Authority, Oregon Liquor Control Commission and Oregon Department of Agriculture, says growers that failed test results are referred to the Agriculture Department for further investigation.

Pair arrested on human trafficking charge

KLAMATH FALLS (AP) — Two Klamath Falls residents are facing prostitution charges related to what

police say could be a widespread human trafficking ring.

The Herald and News reports that a 28-year-old man and a 26-year-old woman were arrested last week. According to an indictment, the pair is believed to have forced at least one female victim into prostitution on three separate occasions between Oct. 8 and Nov. 6 in Medford.

Medford Police Department spokesman Lt. Kevin Walruff says the investigation is ongoing. He says the Klamath Falls pair is believed to be part a human trafficking ring with roots in Medford and Bend and connections to Washington and Wyoming.

Corrections

The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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