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News Release

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Minnetonka man sentenced for violating the Clean Water Act

The Chief Executive Officer and President of Eco Finishing Co., of Fridley, was sentenced this week in federal court for violating the Clean Water Act, the federal law aimed at protecting our nation's waters.

On Oct. 1 in St. Paul, United States District Court Judge John Tunheim sentenced Keith David Rosenblum, 41, Minnetonka, to 15 months in prison and two years supervised release on one count of felony conspiracy to defraud the U.S.; two counts of felony violations of the Clean Water Act; and 10 counts of negligent violations of the Act. Rosenblum will also pay a \$250,000 fine and serve 200 hours of community service. Rosenblum was convicted by a federal jury in March.

"The defendant was convicted of serious environmental crimes, including conspiring against effective enforcement of the Clean Water Act," said U.S. Attorney Frank J. Magill. "We will continue to vigorously prosecute crimes committed against our environment."

"This sentence should put companies, their executives and managers on notice that environmental compliance is important," said Randall Ashe, Acting Special Agent in Charge of the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigative Division in Chicago. "Violators will be aggressively pursued."

Eco Finishing, located at 5100 Industrial Blvd., is a metal finishing business that coats metal products. It was fined \$225,000 in February 2007 for violating the Clean Water Act by discharging untreated or inadequately treated hazardous wastewater.

According to court documents, the company discharges industrial wastewater that enters the sewer system operated and overseen by Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES). Prior to discharge, the company is to treat the wastewater to meet metal and cyanide discharge parameters set forth in the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit issued to the company by MCES.

A superseding indictment was filed against Meister on Jan. 23, 2008. That indictment charged him with conspiracy and alleged several violations of Clean Water Act permit conditions related to, among other things, violations of limits on the company's discharge of metals and cyanide in its industrial wastewater.

According to an Environmental Protection Agency affidavit, MCES and the EPA began investigating the company in January 2005. MCES was contacted by an environmental manager at Eco Finishing about concerns he had with the company's wastewater treatment practices. The manager reported that Clean Water Act violations documented during internal wastewater monitoring were not reported to MCES and that the facility's cyanide destruction system was not properly working. According to internal summaries, the company was discharging levels of metals and cyanide that were well above the permitted limits.

The investigation also revealed that the company on several occasions altered its production and wastewater treatment practices when regulators were conducting on-site compliance testing. The alterations were designed to deceive the government by limiting the company's discharge of pollutants when the company was being monitored. When regulators ended compliance testing, the company would resume normal operations, resulting in violations.

A second defendant, Martin Wayne Meister, 39, Brooklyn Park, was also convicted, and is scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 6. Meister, the company's plant manager, was convicted of eight counts of negligent violations of the Clean Water Act.

This case is the result of an investigation by the EPA-Criminal Investigation Division, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and MCES. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney David M. Genrich.