



Enforcement News

Los Angeles County Environmental Laboratory Owner Pleads Guilty to Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund Fraud

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SACRAMENTO – The owner of a Southern California environmental laboratory has pleaded guilty to a felony charge of filing false information and overcharging for clean-up costs submitted to the State Water Resources Control Board’s Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund.

In addition to being sentenced to 30 days community service, Roobik Yaghoubi, owner of Cal Tech Environmental Laboratories (CTEL) in Paramount, has been ordered to pay \$190,000 in restitution to the State Water Board, including \$70,000 already seized from his home.

“Accredited laboratories that produce high scientific integrity data are the centerpiece of all environmental protection programs,” said Christine Sotelo, chief of California’s Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP). “This case is an important lesson for the laboratory community, in that we will aggressively pursue laboratories that violate state laws and regulations, and fail to produce data of known and documented quality.”

The plea resulted from an [investigation](#) by the ELAP and the board’s Office of Enforcement. The investigation uncovered evidence of altered data, failed quality control tests, gaps in the chain of custody, improper reuse of sample containers, and poor housekeeping of laboratory equipment.

The Underground Storage Tank (UST) Cleanup Fund, financed by a 2-cent per gallon gasoline tax, is used to reimburse contractors who perform cleanup up to \$1.5 million per site for cleaning up petroleum leaks at underground storage tank facilities statewide. The fund has reimbursed more than \$3.6 billion since 1992, including \$132 million in 2016. About 8,700 sites have been remediated and closed since the UST Clean Up Fund’s inception in 1989.

“Accurate and reliable analytical data is essential to ensure that state funds are being used appropriately and that threats to water quality are being negated,” said Yvonne West, director of the Office of Enforcement. “The Office of Enforcement will vigorously investigate and prosecute unscrupulous individuals who defraud the people of the state and sacrifice water quality for financial gains.”



CTEL had been in business since 1999 and was accredited by ELAP to analyze water and soil samples using specific wastewater and hazardous waste analytical methods. The laboratory's accreditation expired nearly two years ago.

Data generated by CTEL have been used by dozens of clients statewide, including the State Water Board claimants, environmental consultants, real estate and construction services, corrosion control services, activated carbon suppliers, waste management services, metal plating facilities and others. Anyone who has used CTEL or another laboratory and has concerns about quality of work or accuracy of a laboratory's billing practices, are encouraged to contact Jacob Oaxaca by email at Jacob.Oaxaca@waterboards.ca.gov or by phone at (916) 323-3433.

A copy of the complaint against CTEL and Yaghoubi, along with his felony plea filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court, can be found on the [State Water Board's Office of Enforcement](#) website.

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