



Enforcement News

State Water Board Investigation Leads to Arrest of Los Angeles County Environmental Lab Owner for Fraud

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SACRAMENTO – A State Water Resources Control Board investigation into an environmental testing laboratory has led to criminal charges against Paramount-based Cal Tech Environmental Laboratories, LLC (CTEL) and its owner, Roobik Yaghoubi, over allegations of providing falsified data to the state.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office has charged Yaghoubi with grand theft, generating false documents, and causing false documents to be filed with the state of California, all felonies. Yaghoubi was arrested at his home Nov. 16 and is free on bail. If convicted, Yaghoubi faces up to five years in jail.

The arrest and criminal charges against Yaghoubi and CTCL came as a result of the State Water Board's ongoing investigation by its Environmental Laboratory Accreditation Program (ELAP), and its Fraud, Waste and Abuse Prevention Unit. The investigation led to the seizure of boxes of documents at the CTCL facility, located at 6814 Rosecrans Ave., Paramount, and the subsequent felony charges.

"This should serve as a warning to other laboratories that the State Water Board is committed to ensuring that ELAP-accredited laboratories produce data of known and documented quality," said Christine Sotelo, program chief for ELAP. "Our program will aggressively investigate and prosecute those who commit fraud to the maximum extent of the law."

Yaghoubi is alleged to have altered results of environmental samples from underground storage tank facilities with petroleum leaks. The investigation uncovered evidence of altered data, failed quality control tests, gaps in the chain of custody (sample handling), improper reuse of sample containers, and poor housekeeping of laboratory equipment.

Cal Tech Environmental Laboratories has 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 lab's accreditation expired in September 2016 and it did not reapply.

Data generated by CTCL has been used by dozens of clients statewide, including Underground Storage Tank Cleanup Fund (Cleanup Fund) sites, environmental consultants,



real estate and construction services, corrosion control services, activated carbon suppliers, waste management services, metal plating facilities and others.

“Our evidence indicates that there are no valid laboratory reports coming out of CTCL, and the Cleanup Fund will be suspending payment of CTCL costs until there is a determination in this case,” said Cris Carrigan, director of the State Water Board’s Office of Enforcement.

The Cleanup Fund, which is financed by a 2-cent per gallon gasoline tax, is used to reimburse up to \$1.5 million per site for cleaning up petroleum leaks at underground storage tank facilities statewide. The Cleanup Fund has reimbursed more than \$3.6 billion since 1992 -- including \$132 million in 2016. Approximately 8,700 Cleanup Fund sites have been remediated and closed since the program’s inception in 1989.

A copy of the complaint against CTCL and Yaghoubi, which was filed in Los Angeles County Superior Court, can be found on the State Water Board’s website:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/enforcement/orders_actions.shtml

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