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**Department of Justice**  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Eastern District of Tennessee

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, October 18, 2017

## **Owner and Employee of Metal Plating Government Contractor Plead Guilty to Hazardous Waste Crimes**

### **Defendants Illegally Stored Hazardous Wastes and Falsified Labels to Deceive Environmental Inspectors**

Phillip Michael Huddleston, 61, pleaded guilty today to violating the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act ("RCRA") by illegally storing hazardous waste without a permit at Protech Metal Finishing, LLC, a metal plating facility he owned and operated in Vonore, Tennessee.

John Thomas Hatfield, 43, Protech's production manager, pleaded guilty on October 2, 2017, to being an accessory after-the-fact to Protech's illegal storage of hazardous waste. In order to hinder an investigation of Protech's compliance with the RCRA, Hatfield represented that containers of hazardous waste were accurately labeled when he knew that they were not.

"These guilty pleas are the result of notable efforts undertaken by multiple law enforcement agencies to enforce provisions in government contracts and the RCRA that protect human health and the environment," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey H. Wood. "In this case, what was at stake was the health and safety of Protech employees and the community of Vonore, Tennessee."

When Congress passed the RCRA, it determined that the disposal of, and inadequate controls over hazardous waste "will result in substantial risks to human health and the environment." To that end, the RCRA imposes "cradle-to-grave" tracking, handling, and reporting controls to ensure that companies like Protech properly manage the generation, storage, transport, and disposal of hazardous wastes. The maximum penalty for each felony RCRA count is five years in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The maximum penalty for this accessory-after-the-fact count is one year in prison and a fine of \$25,000.

Defendants Hatfield and Huddleston are scheduled to be sentenced by Senior District Court Judge Leon Jordan on January 10 and January 8, 2018, respectively.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Matt Morris of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Tennessee, and Trial Attorneys Cassandra Barnum and Senior Trial Attorney Todd W. Gleason of the Environment and Natural Resources Division. The prosecution is the result of an investigation by the IRS, EPA-CID, TVA-OIG, Department of Defense, and Department of Energy.