

## JUSTICE NEWS

### Department of Justice

Office of Public Affairs

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 3, 2017

## **Gas Station Operator Pleads Guilty in Mississippi to Discharge of Hazardous Pollutant Into City Sewage Treatment System**

Mahant Singh, operator of a convenience store and gas station in Yazoo City, Mississippi, pleaded guilty today to a criminal violation of the Clean Water Act. Singh admitted to discharging the contents of an underground fuel storage tank into a sewage line connected to the Yazoo City wastewater treatment system, which created a fire or explosion hazard and risked contaminating local water supplies, announced Acting Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey H. Wood for the U.S. Department of Justice Environment and Natural Resources Division and Acting U.S. Attorney Harold Brittain for the Southern District of Mississippi.

As charged in the criminal information, at the end of April 2016, water from rainstorms leaked into one of the underground gasoline storage tanks at the 49 Quick Stop though an inadequately maintained tank cap. The presence of water in the fuel storage tank triggered an automatic shut off, preventing the dispensing of gasoline. When there had been a similar water leak into a Quick Stop tank about a year earlier, in March 2015, defendant Singh arranged for a commercial tank service company to remove the water and gasoline mixture from his tank and to dispose of it properly, by separating the water and gasoline.

Instead of removing the gasoline and water mixture from his tank, as he had a year earlier, on or about April 28, 2016, defendant Singh pumped some of the content of the contaminated Quick Stop tank into an opening in the sewage line. Singh did so by extending a hose to the bottom of the tank where water might collect underneath the lighter gasoline. The other end of the hose he placed into the sewer pipe. Singh turned on a pump connected to the hoses, forcing liquid from the tank into the sewer line while he waited on customers at the Quick Stop store. In so doing, defendant Singh discharged liquid from the gasoline storage tank into the Yazoo City wastewater treatment system, thereby negligently introducing a pollutant into the system which created a fire or explosion hazard.

"The unpermitted discharge of gasoline-laden water into a community's water treatment system is illegal, dangerous, and can also place the health of the community at risk," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Wood. "These Clean Water Act charges, along with the guilty plea, should send a strong message that these unlawful acts, which place the public at risk, harm the environment, and damage local infrastructure, will not be tolerated."

"We are fortunate that the illegal disposal of contaminated gasoline did not cause an explosion or injury," said Director Chris Sanders of the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality's (MDEQ) Office of Pollution Control. "A quick response by Yazoo City and MDEQ officials to identify the source of the discharge limited the risk of harm to the public and to the city's sewage treatment system. However, numerous buildings, including a school, had to be evacuated when gasoline fumes were detected in several areas throughout the city. Cooperation between EPA's Criminal Investigation Division and MDEQ to this illegal disposal was essential to these charges announced today. The State of Mississippi, through MDEQ, works closely with EPA in pursuing criminal enforcement of pollution prevention statutes."

Federal law authorizes a Class A misdemeanor under the Clean Water Act for any person who negligently introduces into a publicly owned treatment works any pollutant or hazardous substance which the defendant person knew or reasonably should have known could cause personal injury or property damage or to introduce into the system any material other than in compliance with all applicable Federal, State, or local requirements or permits. Under the Clean

Water Act, defendant Singh faces up to one year in prison; a term of supervised release of not more than five years; and a fine of up to \$100,000.

Sentencing is scheduled for July 17, 2017.

Acting Assistant Attorney General Wood and Acting U.S. Attorney Brittain commended the efforts of the Environmental Protection Agency and state regulatory agencies for their diligent work in the investigation of this matter.

---

**Topic(s):**

Environment

**Component(s):**

Environment and Natural Resources Division

USAO - Mississippi, Southern

**Press Release Number:**

17-491

*Updated May 3, 2017*