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PRESS RELEASE

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CHICO BUSINESSMAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ILLEGALLY DUMPING ASBESTOS DA says, “When You Play Stupid Games, You win Stupid Prizes.”

A Chico businessman pleaded guilty today in Butte County Superior Court to three criminal charges arising from an incident in February of 2020 when he was caught dumping asbestos on his property in a North Chico residential neighborhood.

Richard E. Parks, 71, of Chico, pleaded guilty to felony charges of transporting hazardous materials without a permit and improper disposal of hazardous materials. He also pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of endangering a state waterway.

Butte County District Attorney Mike Ramsey said the charges arose from an incident in February of 2020 when the California Department of Fish and Wildlife was contacted by a concerned citizen in North Chico about a man, later identified as Parks, who was seen dumping large quantities of suspicious waste on his own property.

A Fish and Wildlife warden responded on the morning of February 29, 2020 and contacted Parks as Parks was in the process of dumping the contents of a dump truck into a large freshly dug hole on Parks’ residential property. In the hole, the warden immediately noticed a number of large bags labeled “Asbestos.” The warden quarantined the scene and contacted the Butte County District Attorney’s Office, who sent its environmental crimes investigator to assist. An environmental scientist was also called to test the bags, and it was confirmed they contained asbestos, a known toxic and carcinogenic substance. Parks’ property was immediately treated as a crime scene, and was locked down by law enforcement.

Ramsey said investigators from the Department of Fish and Wildlife, the California Department of Toxic Substance Control (DTSC) out of Sacramento, and the District Attorney’s Office served a search warrant at Park’s property, taking additional samples of the material and taking steps to ensure the dangerous materials would not spread further. During the investigation, it was learned Parks had removed the asbestos from buildings he owned at the North Valley Plaza in Chico, and had transported it to his own residential property. Parks did not possess any of the proper permits or authorization needed to transport the asbestos, and dumped the asbestos in a way that could cause it to become airborne and expose other nearby residences.

Additionally, Ramsey said, the location where Parks dumped the asbestos was also a drainage

into nearby Rock Creek. Ramsey said investigators also discovered another location on the same property where Parks had dumped asbestos several years before.

Ramsey said after the discovery, his office worked with the Department of Toxic Substance Control to have Parks ordered to have all the asbestos professionally removed by an independent environmental cleanup company at his expense. The DTSC monitored the process, which took several months. The entire process cost Parks in excess of \$230,000 to date. Ramsey said Parks' property is now considered safe from asbestos by DTSC.

Ramsey said Parks' sentence will include formal felony probation with 120 days in Butte County Jail and a \$100,000 fine. Additionally, Parks will be responsible for paying for the testing of neighboring properties to determine if they were affected by his dumping of the toxic materials, as well as for any cleanup that may become necessary for those properties. The DA said that process has already begun.

Ramsey said had Parks chosen to dispose of the material properly in the first place, it would only have cost less than \$10,000. Ramsey said that because of Parks' cheap, reckless and criminal decision to dump the toxic asbestos at his house instead, when the cleanup and criminal processes are over, it will have cost Parks well in excess of \$330,000, noting, "When you play stupid games, you win stupid prizes."

Parks will next appear in court on July 22, 2021 to begin his sentence and confirm any further restitution owing from his felonious acts.

