Man Pleads Not Guilty to Stealing Drug Recipes

JENNIFER DOBNER & PAUL FOY, Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A scientist accused of stealing trade secrets from a Utah chemistry company pleaded not guilty Thursday to federal charges, including newly filed counts of computer fraud.

Prabhu Mohapatra, 42, originally was charged in November with a single theft charge. Prosecutors have since added a second charge of theft of trade secrets and two counts of computer fraud.

If convicted on all counts, the chemist faces up to 10 years in prison. Public defenders declined to comment.

Authorities say Mohapatra, who had worked for Frontier Scientific Inc., emailed the company's drug recipes to a brother-in-law in India. Investigators say that man was setting up a competing company to undercut Frontier Scientific on prices it charges for pharmaceutical chemicals.

Frontier Scientific of North Logan, Utah, supplies the chemicals for research and drug discovery. The company's chief executive, Tim Miller, has said Frontier is the only company that can make large, pure quantities of an organic chemical that has several applications that include an ingredient in new drugs, solar cells and batteries. The chemical goes by the name 2,2'-dipyrromethane.

Court papers show Mohapatra's moves were tracked on a company computer in October as he fell under suspicion. The company took a mirror image of his laptop's hard drive. Computer logs showed he opened files containing the chemical recipes, created new documents for them and emailed the information to the relative, the court papers alleged.

The company says it found a reply from his brother-in-law that said he planned to make a five-month supply of the chemicals for a competing German company, Porphyrin Systems.

Mohapatra was placed on leave Oct. 26 and later confessed his role in a meeting with company executives, court papers said. Days later, he sent an email pleading with his brother-in-law to drop plans for making chemicals. According to court documents, he wrote: "I will lose my job and even could face jail time."

The indictment on the new charges accused Mohapatra of stealing a recipe for a second chemical. The computer fraud charges alleged that he wasn't authorized to take the information from a protected database.

A trial was set for Feb. 13. He remained free on bail.

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