Judge Eases Ex-BP Engineer's Travel Limits

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal magistrate agreed Tuesday to ease travel restrictions he imposed on a former BP engineer charged with deleting text messages about the company's response to the 2010 oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

U.S. Magistrate Daniel Knowles III ruled Kurt Mix, 50, of Katy, Texas, can travel throughout the continental United States while he is free on bond, provided he reports his travel plans to pretrial services officers at least a week in advance.

Earlier this month, Knowles ruled Mix must limit his travel to Louisiana, Texas, Massachusetts and New York. But he agreed to amend his earlier order at the request of Mix's attorneys, who are based in Massachusetts and New York.

Mix worked on BP's efforts to stop the leak from its blown-out Macondo well off the Louisiana coast. Prosecutors claim he deleted text messages to a supervisor and a contractor to prevent them from being used in a federal grand jury's probe of the spill.

Mix pleaded not guilty on May 3 to two counts of obstruction of justice. During his arraignment, a prosecutor claimed Mix had intended to leave the country for a job in Australia, "never to return." The prosecutor also noted Mix had applied for a green card to Canada as recently as in March.

Mix's attorneys accused prosecutors of distorting the facts and rejected the notion that he posed a flight risk.

"The statements are inaccurate. They're also highly prejudicial," defense attorney Joan McPhee said during Tuesday's hearing.

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