

Man Pleads Guilty to Stealing Company's Formulas

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A scientist accused of stealing secret formulas from a Utah chemistry company has pleaded guilty to a federal computer charge.

Prabhu Mohapatra entered the plea Friday in U.S. District Court to one count of unlawful access to a protected computer, in exchange for prosecutors dropping 25 other charges against him, the Deseret News reported.

Mohapatra, 42, had worked for North Logan-based Frontier Scientific Inc. from 2009 to 2011. He admitted to accessing a company chemical resource notebook and emailing the formula for meso-Tetraphenylporphine, or TPP, to his brother-in-law in India.

Investigators say that relative was setting up a competing company to undercut Frontier Scientific on prices it charges for pharmaceutical chemicals. Frontier Chemical, which supplies chemicals for research and drug discovery, says no other company in the world produces TPP in such large quantities.

The case marked the first time federal authorities filed industrial espionage charges in Utah, according to FBI officials. Until 1996, the theft of trade secrets wasn't a federal crime, and the FBI had spotty success trying to prosecute such cases using other statutes.

Congress then passed the Economic Espionage Act, giving the FBI full authority to pursue the cases. Many companies handle such cases internally, afraid the news will lower their company's stock or send investors fleeing, federal authorities said.

Mohapatra in December pleaded not guilty to federal charges, including computer fraud and theft of trade secrets. He was arrested Nov. 14 and released the same day after his moves were tracked on a company computer.

He was placed on leave Oct. 26 and later confessed his role in a meeting with company executives, according to court documents.

Mohapatra faces up to five years in prison when he's sentenced Aug. 28.

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