

# ***DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE***

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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**RESTAURANT GREASE HAULERS SENTENCED FOR FELONY CLEAN WATER ACT VIOLATIONS CHARLOTTE, NC** - Ecosolve, LLC (Ecosolve), its President at the time of its crimes, Ralph Rogers, and a former employee, Thomas Forebush, were sentenced today in U.S. District Court for their intentional violations of the Clean Water Act. Previously sentenced were four other officials, Leanne Ingram, Tara Presson, James Branham, and Whit Gibson.

Ecosolve is a Charlotte company that is retained by restaurants and food outlets to remove, haul, pre-treat, and dispose of waste from grease traps. Instead, however, the defendants trained drivers to discharge waste back into customers' grease traps and into the public sewer system instead of removing all of the waste and hauling it to the company's pretreatment facility for processing and disposal. This activity was in violation of the Clean Water Act because the customers' grease traps were not designated discharge points for such waste. Grease trap waste is a pollutant that, if not properly disposed of, can cause serious backups of the sewer system, at great expense to taxpayers. Ecosolve was ordered to pay \$160,000 in fines – the maximum permitted by law for the charge to which it pleaded guilty – and to serve three years on probation that will include: permitting the government, without notice, to inspect its books and records, facilities, and equipment; abiding by an environmental compliance plan under supervision of the government; and self-reporting any violation or possible violation of any environmental law, regulation, ordinance, or other requirement.

Rogers was ordered to serve three years of probation, including 12 months in home confinement, and to pay \$7,200 in fines. Forebush was ordered to serve 12 months and one day in jail. After serving his sentence, Forebush will be placed on supervised release for three years. The remaining defendants were sentenced previously. Presson and Ingram were ordered to serve 2 years on probation and pay \$5,000 in fines; Branham was ordered to serve 1 year on probation and pay \$5,000 in fines; and Gibson was ordered to serve 1 year on probation and pay \$2,500 in fines.

In announcing the sentences, Gretchen C.F. Shappert, U.S. Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina, stated, "This case demonstrates that environmental criminals will be caught, prosecuted, and ordered to pay for their violations of the law." Ivan Vikin, Acting Special Agent in Charge for EPA's Criminal Investigation Division in Atlanta, said, "The prosecution of those who illegally dispose of waste proves it does not pay to cut corners when dealing with the environment." North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper stated, "Clean water is a vital resource for all North Carolinians. Our SBI environmental crimes investigators will continue to go after criminal polluters."

The following agencies participated in the investigation of this case: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Criminal Investigation Division, North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, and U.S. Department of Transportation. The prosecution was handled for the government by Assistant United States Attorney Steven R. Kaufman, with assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Justice's Environmental Crimes Section.

