

Pollution trial paints different pictures of UNDMJ supervisors

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The trial of a director at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey on charges that he authorized the unlawful discharge of wastewater from the facility began in Newark yesterday with lawyers on each side characterizing the main witnesses in different lights.

A state prosecutor said two supervisors at the facility's power plant will testify that their boss, Gerald Portee, 54, of Franklin Township, ordered them to release the pollutants from a holding tank

into Newark's sewer system, illegally bypassing a meter that measures acidic content.

"Drain it, drain it, it's just water," Deputy Attorney General Betty Rodriguez, in her opening remarks, quoted Portee as saying in his instructions to one of the unwitnesses "disgruntled employees."

Portee has been on leave from that \$113,000-a-year post since his indictment in May. He has denied two charges of unlawful discharge of a pollutant and one of witness tampering.

vict my client."

Bhalla described his client as a native Newarker whose first job at UMDNJ was in the mailroom when he was 20. After attending vocational school, Portee worked his way up the administrative ladder to become director of energy and waste management at the complex, the lawyer said.

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Rodriguez identified Vladimir

Smolensky and Alan Reed as the power plant supervisors who will testify that Portee directed them to dump the contents of a wastewater tank directly into the city's sewer line on Aug. 10 and Aug. 13, 2003.

"Witnesses will tell you that Vladimir Smolensky would not do anything unless the defendant told him to do it," Rodriguez told the jury.

She acknowledged Smolensky agreed to cooperate with authorities in a deal requiring him to admit his own guilt. Bhalla said that should make his testimony suspect. He also said the case will

come down to one person's word against another's.

Rodriguez did not tell the jury what the contaminated substances were. But after testimony ended for the day, the lawyer with the Environmental Crimes Bureau in the state Division of Criminal Justice said the first discharge was sulfuric acid.

The second was an alkaline-based material, she said. Authorities have estimated the releases totaled 12,000 gallons.

The prosecution had time to call one witness yesterday, Glenn McLaughlin, a surveillance engi-

neer with the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, the agency that treats wastewater for Newark and other communities in North Jersey.

McLaughlin testified that in August 2003 there was no evidence of illegal discharges at UMDNJ found by inspectors who were summoned to the facility by an anonymous caller. Violations that were issued were based on what the agency was told by workers at the plant, he said.

The trial is scheduled to continue today in the courtroom of Superior Court Judge Harold Full-

love.