

Asbestos trial judge blasts prosecutors

by UPI

MISSOULA, Mont. -- A U.S. judge says prosecutors in a Montana asbestos contamination trial have misbehaved and is considering throwing out charges against a chemical company.

An angry U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy said Monday in Missoula, Mont., that the trial against the W.R. Grace chemical products company has been marred by many prosecutorial missteps, including repeated violations of court orders and the use of a star witness who lacked credibility, The New York Times reported.

The judge's scolding of federal prosecutor Tim Racicot and his colleagues brought apologies, after which Molloy dismissed all the charges against one of the five Grace defendants, who had been accused of knowing of the asbestos dangers posed to the residents of Libby, Mont., and of actively covering them up, the newspaper said.

The judge also reportedly indicated he was still trying to decide how to untie what he called the "Gordian knot" of other issues in the case.

Scientists have said that a disproportionately high number of Libby residents, up to several hundred, have died from asbestos-related diseases. Prosecutors contend Grace executives knew their vermiculite production caused health problems but did nothing. Company executives say they made good-faith efforts to protect workers.

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