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Judge releases Groom Lake files

Fed documents used in lawsuit made public

By Mary Manning

A Las Vegas federal judge has released a foot-thick stack of government documents, adding details to a lawsuit brought by former workers at the Air Force's secret Groom Lake base.

The former workers charged that they were exposed to toxic materials burned in open pits at the base.

U.S. District Judge Philip Pro dismissed the suit March 6 on grounds that national security at Groom Lake, about 150 miles north of Las Vegas, must take priority over the alleged health and environmental damages. Another suit against the Environmental Protection Agency was dismissed last year.

Nothing startling

Pro ordered blacked out background materials released late Monday. The four volumes of documents contained no startling information, but show the legal battle between the U.S. Justice Department defending national security and Washington, D.C., attorney Jonathan Turley defending the unnamed workers.

When these documents were sealed, Turley said he feared that the documents he had gathered could be used for criminal or civil charges against individual workers.

The documents state that the Justice Department never threatened to search Turley's files or seize any of the materials. Instead, the department insisted, it asked him to turn over the files voluntarily.

There are plenty of blacked-out paragraphs and pages, and some areas indicate entire documents missing.

The workers accused the government of burning hazardous material in open pits, 60 feet long, 15 to 20 feet deep and 30 to 40 feet wide.

The suit alleged fumes caused serious injuries and at least one death.

Sheet metal worker Robert Frost died in 1989, and his widow, Helen, claimed the death was linked to inhaling poisonous smoke from the pits. She was unsuccessful in a suit filed over her husband's death in 1993.

In the released documents, former Groom Lake worker Kim Pagliaro said he saw Frost near the pits. Pagliaro testified at an appeal hearing for Frost.

Pagliaro said whenever black solid flakes escaped from the pits, Groom Lake workers had to check them to see if anything about them linked them to the secret projects at the base.

Several versions of an Air Force security manual the government insisted was classified -- and Pro sealed -- appear in the materials.

Called "DET 3SP JOB KNOWLEDGE," the 29 unnumbered pages indicate codes for use at and near the Nevada Test Site, as well as maps locating Quick Kill Radar (QK1) and a weapons assembly/storage building located at the desert base where some of the most secret military projects, including the F-117 stealth fighter, were tested.

Security information

Directions for stopping nosy inquiries include: "For security reasons if a contractor is asked where he/she works, they will answer, 'E.G.&G. at the Test Site.' Then decline from giving details. For Air Force personnel, they work at Pittman Station, Henderson," said the manual, which circulated on the Internet.

There is no "top secret," "secret" or "classified" markings in any version of the manual. The government argued that some classified documents are not marked so if they fall into the wrong hands, they could not be linked with secret projects.

Rachel, the town closest to the base and now famous as a must-see stop on the new Extraterrestrial Highway, was referred to as Northtown in the manual. Highway 375 -- the ET Highway -- is known as highway and the Test Site is called over-the-hill.

[[Parent](#)]

[Text of Security Manual](#)

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