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Attorney General Brown Obtains Guilty Plea Related to Illegal Dumping of Over 250,000 Scrap Tires in Allegany County *Anne Arundel County Man Pleads Guilty to 17 Environmental Crimes Charges*

BALTIMORE, MD (October 25, 2024) – Attorney General Anthony G. Brown today announced the guilty plea of Michel Osei, 48, of Hanover, Maryland, on environmental crimes charges related to the illegal dumping and ultimate abandonment of over 250,000 scrap tires at a site in Allegany County, Maryland.

On October 16, 2024, Osei pleaded guilty before the Honorable Judge Jeffery S. Getty of the Circuit Court for Allegany County to 17 environmental crimes. Osei pled guilty to one count of unlawful disposal for gain, eight counts of operating a scrap tire facility without a license, and eight counts of improper handling of waste—nuisance. Judge Getty scheduled sentencing for December 17, 2024.



The investigation was led by the Attorney General’s Environmental and Natural Resources Crimes Unit (ENRCU), the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE), and the Maryland Office of the State Fire Marshal.

Scrap tires are tires that are no longer suitable for their original purpose because of wear, damage, or defect. The handling of scrap tires is regulated by MDE through Maryland law, specifically Title 9 of the Environment Article and related regulations. Scrap tires pose a number of health risks to people and the environment. They may only be transported by a licensed scrap tire hauler. Scrap tires may only be stored, sorted, or processed at licensed facilities in accordance with the terms of a license issued by MDE. MDE has a tiered license system that distinguishes between a “Secondary Scrap Tire Collection Facility,” which is authorized to store up to 1,500 scrap tires, and larger operations designated as either a “Primary Scrap Tire Acceptance Facility” or “Scrap Tire Recycler.” The larger facilities require a more detailed and thorough licensure and approval process, similar to the installation of a solid waste acceptance facility or solid waste transfer station, requiring review, notice, public hearing, and bonding.

The investigation revealed that, in June 2021, Osei approached the Allegany County Office of Economic Development with a proposal to operate a scrap tire recycling facility in the county. Osei claimed that the facility would eventually employ up to 50 people and already had millions of dollars’ worth of contracts to send the recycled tires overseas. Based on those representations, the county offered Osei a land-lease with favorable terms for an industrial parcel bordering the Potomac River at 23302 Westernport Road SW in Westernport. On July 19, 2021, Osei began operations at the facility. Osei and his employees would go on to collect over 100,000 scrap tires from various locations in West Virginia. Those tires were then taken to the facility in Westernport. Few tires, if any, were ever removed.

MDE inspectors first became aware of the operation on October 7, 2021. A site inspection and complaint documented approximately 10,000 –15,000 scrap tires at that time. The property had no permits, and the tires were stored outside and uncovered, in heaping piles that posed a significant fire hazard. MDE also contacted the Maryland State Office of the Fire Marshal due to the seriousness of the risk of fire.



Between fall 2021 and spring 2022, MDE and the Fire Marshal ordered Osei to stop operations on multiple occasions. When Osei ultimately abandoned the site in September 2022, it was

estimated that over 250,000 scrap tires remained onsite, strewn across the property and packed into tractor trailer containers. Allegany County has since started to clean up the site.



“Leaving tires outside for an extended period is utterly unacceptable. It poses a serious fire hazard, threatens our air quality, and pollutes our water. Frankly, it’s shocking that any company would be so reckless as to endanger the health of Marylanders in this way,” **said Attorney General Brown**. “Convictions like this are essential to safeguarding our environment and making it crystal clear that businesses must recycle and dispose of scrap tires lawfully. We simply won’t tolerate such irresponsible behavior.”

“This investigation is an excellent example of the strong partnerships between agencies. Our Fire Safety Inspection staff worked closely with the local volunteer fire service, state agencies, and county government to cease an increase in the hazard of tire collection while planning to reduce the overall fire danger,” **said Acting State Fire Marshal Jason M. Mowbray**. “Non-compliant tire collection sites pose a great fire danger to the employees, community, and our fire service first responders. Across our country, there have been examples of the conflagrations these facilities can create that underscore the true danger. The State Fire Marshal's Office staff remains steadfast in our commitment to ensuring Maryland is a fire-safe place to live, work, and visit.”

In making today’s announcement, Attorney General Brown thanked the Criminal Division, the Environmental and Natural Resources Crimes Unit, Chief Counsel D’Arcy Talley, Assistant Attorney General Kory H. Lemmert, Chief Investigator Thomas Waugh, and Investigator Ronald Weinreich Jr. Attorney General Brown also thanked partners at the Maryland Department of the Environment, the Maryland Office of the State Fire Marshal, the Allegany County Government, and State’s Attorney for Allegany County James F. Elliott for their assistance in this investigation and prosecution.

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