



San Diego City Attorney Jan I. Goldsmith

NEWS RELEASE

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VONS Settles Lawsuit Alleging Illegal Disposal of Hazardous and Medical Waste

New procedures to be followed under permanent injunction against Safeway, Inc.

The 25 VONS grocery stores in San Diego will place tighter controls on their hazardous and medical wastes as part of a legal settlement agreed to by their parent company, Safeway Inc.

The procedures will end the improper disposal of hazardous and medical waste products, which VONS and Safeway employees had been placing into store trash bins for eventual disposal in local landfills.

The internal procedures are part of a permanent injunction against the company, which had been accused of violating state health and safety laws designed to protect the public and the environment from potential health risks.

The lawsuit against Safeway was filed in Alameda County by 43 California agencies, including the San Diego City Attorney's Office. As part of a stipulated judgment announced today, Safeway also agreed to pay \$9.87 million in civil penalties and costs and to supplemental environmental projects.

The San Diego City Attorney's Office will receive \$45,000 to fund future enforcement of consumer and environmental protection laws.

“Through this sort of collaborative effort by City Attorneys and District Attorneys throughout the state, businesses can be brought into compliance with the law and meet their responsibilities to protect our environment,” City Attorney Jan Goldsmith said. **“Not every landfill is designed and permitted to accept hazardous waste. The proper use of our landfills is of particular importance here in San Diego.”**

The San Diego District Attorney's Office was also a plaintiff the lawsuit against Safeway.

“Safely handling hazardous waste protects our environment and is vital to the health of all Californians,” District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis said. “Our environmental protection team did an outstanding job prosecuting this case and collaborating with other agencies to arrive at today's multi-million dollar judgment.”

The investigation into Safeway's practices began after discovery of improper shipments of hazardous and pharmaceutical waste to Safeway's distribution centers through its reverse logistics program.

The investigation revealed that Safeway was also routinely and systematically sending hazardous and pharmaceutical wastes to local area landfills not equipped to receive such waste.

Upon being notified of the widespread issues, Safeway worked cooperatively to remedy the issue, enhance its environmental compliance program and train its employees to properly handle such waste.

In settling the case before trial, Safeway made no admission of guilt. More than 500 stores and distribution centers, including its VONS, Pavilions and Pak 'n Save stores, were alleged to be engaged in the unsafe storage, handling and disposal of hazardous and pharmaceutical waste generated from spills and customer returns.

Among the toxic, reactive, ignitable and/or corrosive materials that will be strictly tracked are over-the-counter medications, pharmaceuticals, aerosol products, batteries, electronic devices and pool chemicals.

The City Attorney's Consumer & Environmental Protection Unit (CEPU) maintains a Consumer Hotline at (619) 533-5600, which consumers can call to report consumer complaints. For consumer tips and information, check out consumer news on the City Attorney's webpage, Newsletters/Office of the City Attorney or at <http://www.sandiego.gov/cityattorney/media/newsletters.shtml>

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