

Executives at Ontario importer admit crimes

By Mike Cruz

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Two top executives at an Ontario importer Goldenvale, Inc. were sentenced to probation Wednesday after they plead guilty to charges that they illegally imported motorcycles, ATVs and related vehicles from China.

Goldenvale owner Kening N. Ma, 49, pleaded guilty to four felony counts of grand theft during proceedings before Judge Stephan Saleson in West Valley Superior Court, in Rancho Cucamonga, confirmed Deputy District Attorney Douglas Poston. The pleas were reached as part of an agreement with prosecutors.

Ma also will provide restitution to all the victims in the case, Poston said. Vice President Shirley Hyunae Ji, 44, pleaded no contest to one felony count of conspiracy to commit grand theft and one felony count of grand theft.

The defendants are set to be sentenced July 20 to three years probation. Ji is eligible for misdemeanor probation at sentencing, if she complies with terms set up by the court, prosecutors said. Ma will be on felony probation.

Prosecutors had alleged that Ma and Ji profited from false certificates of origin for the vehicles. Dozens of victims purchased vehicles that were not certified by the state Air Resources Board, making them illegal to operate in California.

Victims paid between several hundred dollars up to \$4,000 for each vehicle.

"The felony pleas, sentencing and the amount of time in custody are very significant for a case which had its beginnings in an investigation over air quality issues," Poston said in a telephone interview.

The plea agreement was reached after hours of negotiation between the prosecution, the defense attorneys and the court, Poston said.

Authorities arrested the defendants in March and named them in a 70-count criminal complaint, which included charges of conspiracy, grand theft, possessing a false or blank vehicle registration and money laundering.

In this case, the certificates of origin show a manufacturer name that did not manufacture the vehicles, authorities said. The vehicles also were never certified by the Air Resources Board, thus allowing pollutants into the air.

The California EPA Air Resources Board referred the case to the San Bernardino County District Attorney's Office after a multi-year investigation. Prosecutors alleged three dozen victims in the case, but they say hundreds of victims may benefit from the restitution.

Paul E. Jacobs, chief of Mobile Sources Enforcement for California EPA Air Resources Board, said earlier that his agency referred the case to San Bernardino County because a majority of violations occurred in that county. The two agencies worked together in a joint investigation.

A restitution hearing is set for June 29.

