



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY

KEVIN R. STEELE

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

EDWARD F. McCANN, JR.

FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

COUNTY OF MONTGOMERY

COURTHOUSE

P.O. BOX 311

NORRISTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

19404-0311

SAMUEL J. GALLEN

CHIEF COUNTY DETECTIVE

JESSE S. KING

CHIEF OF STAFF

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S FAX

COUNTY DETECTIVE BUREAU

(610) 278-3090

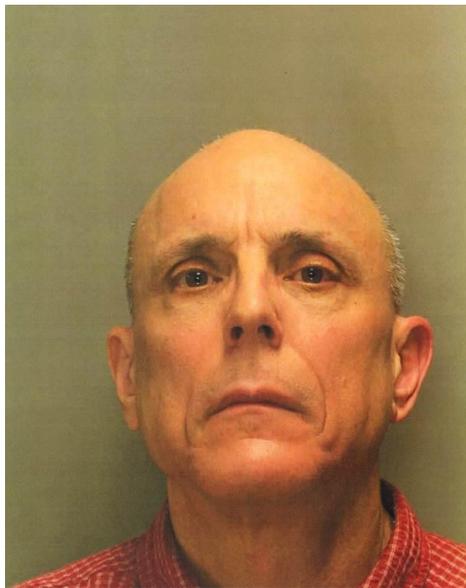
(610) 278-3095

(610) 278-3368

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Kate Delano 610-278-3148

CHEMIST RICHARD O'ROURKE OF WARRINGTON ARRESTED FOR STEALING POTASSIUM CYANIDE FROM MERCK & CO.



NORRISTOWN, Pa. (Feb. 13, 2018) — Montgomery County District Attorney Kevin R. Steele, Bucks County District Attorney Matthew Weintraub, Upper Gwynedd Township Police Chief David Duffy and Warrington Township Police Chief Daniel Friel, along with the FBI, announce the arrest of Richard O'Rourke, 60, of Warrington, Pa., on charges of Causing or Risking Catastrophe, Theft, Receiving Stolen Property and Recklessly Endangering Another Person related to the theft and disposal of 219.79 grams of potassium cyanide stolen from the Merck & Co. laboratory in Upper Gwynedd Township. At the time of the theft, O'Rourke was employed as a senior analytical chemist at Merck & Co.

Upper Gwynedd Township Police were notified on Dec. 16, 2017, by Merck & Co. that O'Rourke may have stolen potassium cyanide from a Merck laboratory. Due to the nature of the crime, Upper Gwynedd Township Police were joined in the investigation by the Montgomery County Detective Bureau, Bucks County Detective Bureau, the FBI, Warrington Township

Police, and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection [PADEP]. The investigation revealed that another longtime senior analytical chemist at Merck & Co. witnessed O'Rourke pouring potassium cyanide, taken from the poison cabinet, into a beaker and then into a Nalgene bottle on Dec. 14, 2017. O'Rourke, who was not required to handle potassium cyanide as part of his work responsibilities, was then observed leaving the building. The investigation revealed that the defendant was planning to use the cyanide to poison rodents on his property, but when he found out there was an investigation, he dumped the chemical into a stormwater inlet in the area of County Line Road and Street Road, between Easton Road and Second Street Pike on Dec. 15, 2017.

The PADEP, contacted by Merck & Co. on Dec. 15, 2017, immediately attempted to locate the dumpsite of the potassium cyanide and began monitoring the water supply for signs of the chemical and toxicity. Both Aqua PA and the Philadelphia Water Department maintain intake facilities that could have been affected by the chemical dump, depending on exactly where the potassium cyanide was disposed of. Aqua Water and the Philadelphia Water Department began testing and monitoring water samples from their intake systems.

“The immediate and decisive action by the Pennsylvania DEP and the collaborative efforts by law enforcement agencies were key to assuring that no one was harmed by the cyanide dump. The significant rainfall helped as well,” said Steele. “It is concerning that someone was able to remove such a poisonous chemical, but thankfully through an immediate and swift response by many people, nobody was hurt.”

PADEP and the water departments remained on high-alert status for two weeks, through Dec. 29, 2017. After two weeks of intensive testing, assessing and monitoring stormwater systems, outfalls, retention basins, waterways and their tributaries, no evidence was found of a toxic impact. At no time was cyanide detected at the drinking water intakes nor from any samples collected and analyzed by Aqua PA and the Philadelphia Water Department. According to PADEP, a significant rainfall occurred several days after the dumping of the potassium cyanide. That rain should have been sufficient to flush the potassium cyanide out of any stormwater inlet, leading the agency to determine that the chemical had been diluted and washed out.

O'Rourke was arraigned before Magisterial District Judge Suzan Leonard, who set bail at \$35,000. The defendant posted bail and was released. A preliminary hearing is scheduled for noon on March 6, 2018, before Judge Leonard.

Approved for release:

Kevin R. Steele

CRIMINAL CHARGES, AND ANY DISCUSSION THEREOF, ARE MERELY ALLEGATIONS AND ALL DEFENDANTS ARE PRESUMED INNOCENT UNTIL AND UNLESS PROVEN GUILTY.