

Geologist sues UPR, PREPA over firing

By **LAVONNE LUQUIS**
Of The STAR Staff

Geologist William McCann filed a \$400,000 civil rights suit Wednesday against officials of the University of Puerto Rico and Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority.

McCann charges he lost his job as head of the Seismic Network after he spoke out against a proposed coal-burning plant on a radio show in October, citing its nearness to a seismic fault.

The Seismic Network, operated by the UPR at Mayaguez, is composed of 21 seismic stations in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands which record earth tremors. McCann was responsible for the maintenance of the stations and its recording site. He was also responsible for public education about earthquake hazards, the suit said.

The suit claims that McCann's right to free speech was violated by UPR Mayaguez Chancellor Alejandro Ruiz, geology department head Alan Smith, and professors James Joyce, Alejandro Soto, Johannes Schellekens and David Larue.

PREPA Director Jose del Valle and his planning director, Orlando Anglero, are also named as defendants in the suit. Del Valle refused to comment on the suit Wednesday.

McCann contends that PREPA tried to influence the Seismic Network to endorse the power plant through the geology department, with which PREPA has a consulting contract.



STAR photo by Carlos Anguita

Seismologist William McCann, who filed a suit in federal court Wednesday claiming his right of free speech has been violated at the UPR Mayaguez campus.

After the radio show and the press coverage it generated, Smith imposed a gag order on McCann, the suit said.

Despite the consequences of opposing the power plant, McCann insists he would do it

all over again.

"My personal stand against the plant has become firmer because of a detailed investigation of the earthquakes that have occurred in that area," he said during a telephone

interview Wednesday.

The Mayaguez Municipal Assembly is holding public hearings on the \$450 million 300-megawatt plant Cogentrix intends to build in Punta Algarrobo, Mayaguez, facing the Mayaguez Bay.

McCann, meanwhile, had hoped to hold his own at the university without going to court.

"This has gone on for 10 months," he said. "And it has been 10 months of agony just trying to find a way to avoid a lawsuit. I'm doing this because I feel that I have no recourse left."

Geology department head Smith was not willing to discuss McCann's suit.

"Until I speak to my lawyer I would not like to comment, especially now that it's gone to court," Smith said Wednesday.

In the past, Smith has claimed that McCann fueled earthquake fears to garner support for a \$6 million upgrade of the Seismic Network.

Chancellor Ruiz, who assumed his post in July, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

McCann's \$6,000-a-year contract at the Seismic Network was not renewed when it expired on May 31. He has taught at Mayaguez since 1986 and is up for tenure review this year.

In his suit, McCann asked the court to order the UPR to reinstate him as Seismic Network director. He also asked for "the immediate cessation of all retaliatory actions" against him.