

# Jury selection starts today in suit brought by geologist

By the STAR Staff

A \$400,000 civil rights suit by geologist William McCann against the University of Puerto Rico and the power authority starts at federal court today.

Jury selection is expected to start at 9 a.m. today. Opening arguments from both sides will then follow at midday, with U.S. District Court Judge Jaime Pieras Jr. hearing the case.

In the lawsuit, the geologist charges that he lost his job as head of the university's Seismic Network after he spoke out against a proposed coal-fired power plant on a radio show, citing its nearness to a seismic fault. McCann opposed the proposed plant by Cogentrix Inc. because of a study of earthquakes in the area.

The court case is expected to last 10 days because of the number of

witnesses in the case.

Attorneys Judith Berkan and Federico Lora will represent McCann; Mirta Rodriguez and Pedro Santiago will represent the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority; and law firm Ledesma Palou will represent UPR Chancellor Alejandro Ruiz.

The Seismic Network, operated by UPR at Mayaguez, is composed of 21 seismic stations in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands which record earthquakes. 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 of free speech was violated by Ruiz, UPR's Mayaguez Chancellor, geology department head Alan Smith and professors James Joyce, Alejandro Soto, Johannes Schellekens and David Larue.

PREPA Director José del Valle and his planning director Orlando Angleró are also named as defendants.

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.

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

McCann asked the court to order the UPR to reinstate him as Seismic Network director and for "the immediate cessation of all retaliatory actions" against him.

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.