

Three guilty in asbestos cleanup violation at former Castle base

By Victor A. Patton

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ATWATER -- Three former executives of the defunct nonprofit Firm Build likely will spend nearly two years in prison after being convicted Monday of violating federal asbestos laws stemming from cleanup at the former Castle Air Force Base in Atwater.

Rudy Buendia III, 50; Patrick Bowman, 46; and Joseph Cuellar, 73, were accused of cutting corners on a renovation project that used at least nine high school vocational students to remove asbestos from the Automotive Training Center at Castle Commerce Center from September 2005 to March 2006.

They pleaded guilty to one felony count of breaking the National Emissions Standards for Hazardous Air Pollutants law regarding the cancer-causing substance.

The agreement with federal prosecutors means Bowman and Cuellar will face 27 months in prison, and Buendia will face 24. They're due to be sentenced by Judge Lawrence J. O'Neill on June 3.