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Tu-Co Peat avoided paying \$54,000 impact fee

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Highlands Today

Tu-co Peat, an Avon Park business that makes potting soil, will be fined by the Highlands County building department for not obtaining a property permit and not paying \$54,000 in impact fees.

Building Official SY Mosley said Friday he's been working on the case for more than a year. The original owner, Lisa Hudec, is the wife of Rick Hudec, 44, of Naples. He was sentenced to 33 months in the federal penitentiary in April 2008, according to a Naples Daily News story. He was convicted of tax evasion and a coverup that enabled their security company to win more than \$150 million in federal contracts.

The Naples Daily News said USProtect Corp. was shut down in March 2008 after the government dropped all its contracts - leaving hundreds of guards with bounced paychecks and no access to retirement accounts. The government pursued forfeiture actions to seize \$6.9 million from a USProtect bank account and property owned by the Naples couple. Rick Hudec was also ordered to forfeit \$1.25 million and pay a \$10,000 fine and \$290,360 in restitution to the Internal Revenue Service.

Hudec was a sponsor of the Gold Rush conference in Washington, D.C., that helped contractors find work in Iraq and also was a panelist in other conferences on strategies to enter Iraq.

Hudec admitted in 2007 that he concealed past convictions and judgments to obtain government security contracts for federal courthouses, the Department of Justice, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the US Air Force, the Social Security Administration and other federal buildings. At the time, he'd been convicted of fraud in four separate federal criminal prosecutions and had numerous civil judgments for fraud.

A month after the security company shut down, she purchased Tu-Co Peat, a farm supply company in Sebring, according to state incorporation records. She operated it out of Avon Park with her husband under the name Ram Peat. She also operated RC Holdings of Florida in Avon Park, the Naples Daily News said.

Attempts to contact the Hudecs were unsuccessful. They do not have a listed phone number in Highlands County.

A call to Tu-Co Peat was answered by Karen Fugate, who works with the receiver. She said she could not comment about the case.

In Sebring, a court clerk said the Tu-Co Peat file was contained in six thick folders.

"They pulled a permit for an ag building," Moseley said. "After it was complete, they built an office inside without a permit."

Tu-Co Peat avoided paying \$54,000 in impact fees, which will now be assessed, Mosley said. The fine will be about \$500.

The company must also apply for the proper permits from his office, the county engineer and Southwest Florida Water Management District.