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House subcommittee wants to look into Energy Department investigation

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Now that both sides have had their say on whether the federal government vigorously prosecutes oil price frauds, the staff of a House subcommittee wants to go one step further.

Staff workers say they intend to

look up Department of Justice paperwork relating to fraud cases and find out why some cases referred by the Department of Energy were not pursued.

The investigation by the energy subcommittee of the House Commerce Committee will examine re-

ferrals that were turned down in the Justice Department as well as examples where a field office recommended a case to its superiors in the Energy Department and the higher-ups let the matter die.

Many of the alleged oil price frauds fell into two broad categories: what energy lawyers call "daisy chains" in which oil resale companies sell a given amount of oil repeatedly among themselves to drive up its price before a final sale, and "flip-flops" where price-controlled oil from old wells is falsely certified as control-free oil from newer or more expensive wells.

Monday, the Justice Department defended itself against an allegation that it failed to follow up promising

cases of oil price fraud. The chief accuser was Joseph McNeff, a regional lawyer for the Department of Energy, who told the subcommittee last week his superiors and the Justice Department showed little interest in flagrant cases of fraud.

McNeff said he was punished with a reassignment to Dallas for his zeal, and he and others felt price fraud investigations were being sabotaged.

John Keeney, a deputy assistant attorney general, said that he and others at the Justice Department were familiar with McNeff's allegations, but found no "credible evidence" to back them up. McNeff had only "gut reactions, instincts, feelings" and nothing to prove his

charges, Keeney said. Keeney said there had been some delays in federal prosecution but lines of communication were stronger now between energy and justice officials.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., chairs the House energy subcommittee. "It is incredible since the oil embargo of 1973 there has been only one repeat that, only one — and successful prosecution case."

Dingell said the subcommittee had heard "a sorry tale of incompetence" failing willfully or otherwise, to their duties.

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ENGINEERS — CONSTRUCTORS

Gasoline supplies tighter by 9 percent this summer

United Press International
The gasoline squeeze for June apparently will be almost 9 percent tighter than it was last summer, a proposition that has already sparked hoarding, speculation, violence and an argument over the merits of "moonshine in the gas tank."

The Lundberg Letter, an authoritative petroleum industry newsletter, said deliveries this month from major oil companies will run about 91.4 percent of the supply available a year ago.

"Because allocations are based on historical sales, gasoline supplies should be relatively greater in areas where summer travel has been greater," the Los Angeles-based publication said. "On balance, June allocations appear to provide for some vacation travel, but not what it would have been normally."

In Fairfax, Va., increasing numbers of motorists were taking no chances and the rise in demand for private gasoline storage tanks prompted the county's board of supervisors to consider an ordinance outlawing their use.

"It's a public safety risk and it's very anti-social for someone to be out there grabbing all the gas he can get before all goes dry," said Supervisor Warren C Atkins. "I'm told one gallon of gas has the potential explosive power of four sticks of dynamite."

In Baltimore, an alleged effort to steal gasoline from cars in a used car lot landed two men in the hospital when night watchman Richard Kirby, 50, opened fire on them.

Police said Henry Barnett, 29, was in critical condition with bullet wounds in the stomach and leg. His 24-year-old brother, Michael, was wounded in the hand. Kirby was charged with two counts of assault with intent to murder.

Maryland Comptroller Louis Goldstein blamed the gasoline shortage in his state largely on the sale of surplus gasoline — legal, and

even encouraged under federal allocation rules — to speculators who then sell it back to the oil companies, effectively keeping it off the market.

Goldstein said such "spot market" trading has nearly tripled, increasing from 1.5 million gallons in March 1978 to 3.2 million gallons in March this year.

In Richmond, Va., even the much-touted gasoline substitute gasohol sparked controversy.

Energy and economic adviser James Benson told a public hearing the least efficient way to produce the alcohol is by using ethanol because there still is no way to produce alcohol that will supply more than it takes to make it.

Mo Campbell, a Penn State gasohol promoter, disagreed. "Moonshine in your gas tank" is simple," he said. "Everyone understand it."

NASA hopes to aim Skylab debris entry

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The space agency plans to try to keep Skylab from falling on the most heavily populated regions of the world if possible — even if it means slightly increasing the risk of debris falling on the United States.

Dr. Robert Froesch, administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, made this clear in testimony Monday to a House subcommittee. But he said the odds are that Skylab's debris will drop harmlessly into an ocean.

The 78.5-ton assembly is expected to fall sometime between June 27 and July 21, with July 9 the most likely date. Froesch said NASA will have no idea where Skylab will fall until the last 24 hours.

He said there is roughly one chance in 50 of one injury if Skylab re-enters the atmosphere on an orbit that crosses populous Europe and Asia, but only a one-in-500 chance of an injury anywhere in the world if it falls on an orbit taking it over the United States.

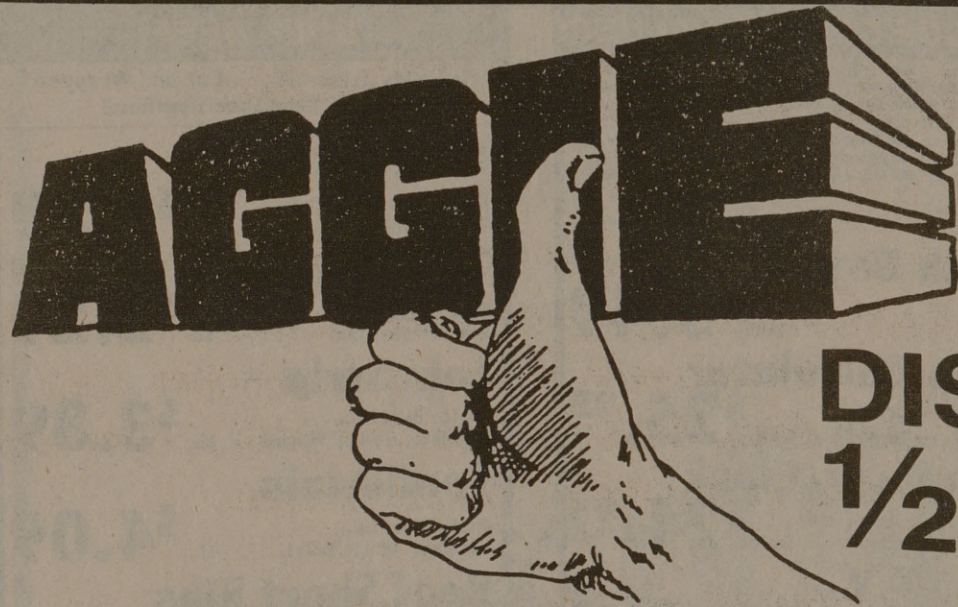
Rep. John L. Burton, D-Calif., chairman of the subcommittee,

asked Froesch if that looked as though Skylab might fall on India, which has a heavy population, would NASA try to aim orbit and therefore increase chances Skylab would fall on orbit that crosses the United States?

"That's correct," Froesch said. "We are proceeding on the basis that the problem is to decrease the small probability of a human being anywhere."

"That's very noble," Burton said. "We spend billions of dollars on space exploration and think it's very noble that our own agencies would be taking a chance on the slight possibility of a human being anywhere. It's a very noble thing to do."

Froesch said later the agency would try to influence Skylab's time and place, if possible, to reduce the risk was made concurrent of the White House.



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