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Whole Foods to Pay \$1.6 Million in Hazardous Waste Settlement

Martinez, Calif. – Contra Costa County District Attorney Diana Becton announced today that Yolo County Superior Court Judge Thomas E. Warriner has ordered Whole Foods Market California Inc. and two related entities to pay \$1,643,500 as part of a settlement of a civil-environmental prosecution. Over \$200,000 of this amount will help support various environmental projects, including the prosecution of environmental violations. This resolution was a direct result of the work of local regulatory agencies, including Contra Costa County Health Services Certified Unified Program Agency (CUPA), 21 other California District and City Attorneys, and Whole Foods.

According to the District Attorneys' complaint, Whole Foods Market California Inc., Mrs. Gooch's Natural Food Markets Inc., and WFM-WO Inc., handled various hazardous wastes and materials throughout the state over a five-year period. These hazardous wastes and materials included batteries, electronic devices, ignitable liquids, aerosol products, cleaning agents, and other flammable, reactive, toxic, and corrosive materials. The settlement resolves the allegations made in the District Attorneys' complaint.

"Today's settlement resolves this matter with Whole Foods. I would like to mention that the Whole Foods companies were cooperative throughout our investigation and prosecution while we worked toward a fair resolution to their previous deficiencies," said District Attorney Becton. "The terms of this settlement require these companies to improve the training of their staff and the management of their hazardous waste."

The judgment announced today was designed to prevent Whole Foods stores from committing similar hazardous-waste violations in the future. The judgment requires Whole Foods Market California Inc., Mrs. Gooch's Natural Food Markets Inc., and WFM-WO Inc. to properly label, package, and store hazardous waste to minimize the risk of exposure to employees and customers, and to ensure that incompatible wastes do not combine to cause dangerous chemical reactions. The judgment also requires the companies to properly document their hazardous waste and dispose of their hazardous waste at authorized disposal facilities.

Under the settlement, the Whole Foods entities must pay \$1,202,800 in civil penalties, \$202,800 to reimburse the costs of the investigation, and \$237,900 to fund supplemental environmental projects furthering consumer protection and environmental enforcement in California. The Whole Foods entities must also hire an employee to strengthen the companies' hazardous-waste programs.