

Cell Tower Company Pays After Disturbing Site

(September 1, 2001) BIRMINGHAM — A Chattanooga company agreed to pay \$12,000 to the Alabama Historical Commission after disturbing a previously unknown archaeological site while building a cellular telephone tower. Signal One worked out the deal with the commission after rock tools and other items were uncovered on a tree farm near Little Piney Creek in north Alabama. The company was building a 300-foot antenna tower there. Federal guidelines say cell tower builders making archaeological finds must wait on results from a review of those items before construction can proceed. State historical authorities say Signal One jumped the gun.

Sean Caskie, Signal One's vice president of business development, said the problem arose "due to an oversight by our environmental consultants" and that the company worked with state authorities to settle the matter. "We had to clear some trees to do our site survey work and we found the archaeological material," Caskie said. "We disturbed the site, and the state was pretty upset about it." Elizabeth Brown, a deputy preservation officer for the Alabama Historical Commission, said Signal One didn't wait for the review's results before beginning construction. She said the company cooperated in trying to get the matter settled.

In the past few years, Signal One has carved out a niche building antenna towers and leasing space to cell companies. Caskie said the practice helps reduce the number of towers but still lets cell companies provide better service. Caskie said the cell tower is on a 100-foot by 100-foot piece of property the company acquired from a private landowner. He said the historical artifacts were found in only one corner of the site. "Had there been any type of significant archaeological material discovered, we would have never proceeded with the tower," Caskie said.

Undisturbed As part of the agreement with state historical officials, items found at the site were catalogued and left in place. The company's tower site is off limits to the public, so the archaeological site will remain undisturbed. Signal One also had to publicize its mistake with advertisements in state newspapers. "We recognize the importance of Alabama's rich cultural heritage," Its ad reads. Therefore, we believe that being a good corporate citizen requires us to work with the State of Alabama Historical Commission to reduce the impact of our project on this previously unidentified archaeological site." Ms. Brown said the \$12,000 from Signal One will be used in preservation efforts at the General Joe Wheeler home and property.

Article written by Ted Pratt, The Birmingham News 09/01/2001.