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Wen Ho Lee set free

September 13, 2000

Web posted at: 4:20 p.m. EDT (2020 GMT)

From staff and wire reports

ALBUQUERQUE, New Mexico (CNN) -- Nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee, 60, was released Wednesday after pleading guilty to one felony count of mishandling classified data.

In exchange for Lee's guilty plea the government dropped 58 counts against the Taiwan-born naturalized citizen.

The deal comes after prosecutors and Lee's attorneys held a last-minute meeting to change some of the language in the agreement. The two sides appeared in court briefly Wednesday morning before the hearing was delayed for about an hour.

As part of the proposed deal, Lee agreed to help the FBI account for seven computer tapes, onto which he has admitted downloading sensitive materials. Lee says he destroyed the tapes but prosecutors say they cannot prove that.

The plea deal brings an abrupt end to what was originally touted as a major case of Chinese nuclear espionage and which has mobilized Asian-Americans angered by the perception that Lee was singled out by race because of his



Speaking after his release, Lee said, "I'm going fishing"

VIDEO

Listen to Wen Ho Lee's comments after his release

213K/30 sec.
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Pierre Thomas reports on the plea agreement that could free Wen Ho Lee (Sept. 10)



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Lee was singled out by race because of his ethnic Chinese background.

Lee was fired last year by Los Alamos National Laboratory, where he worked in the top-secret X Division designing the nation's nuclear arsenal, amid government allegations China was spying on the lab's weapons designs. He was never charged with espionage but prosecutors had argued for months that he was a serious national security threat.

Lee was expected to plead guilty Monday and be released, but that hearing was canceled because prosecutors and Lee's attorneys apparently could not agree on the terms of the plea agreement.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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