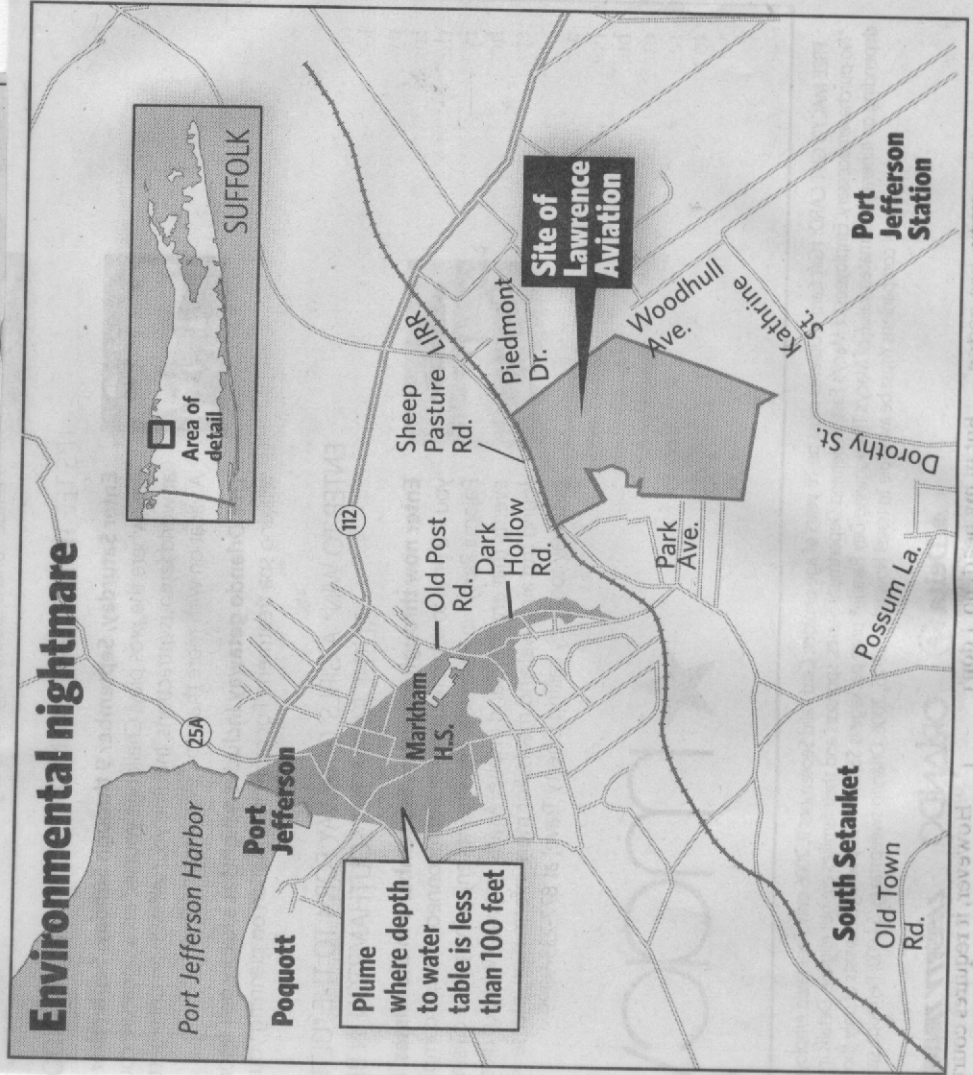


# Toxic waste leads

## to bust

*Newsday 2006*



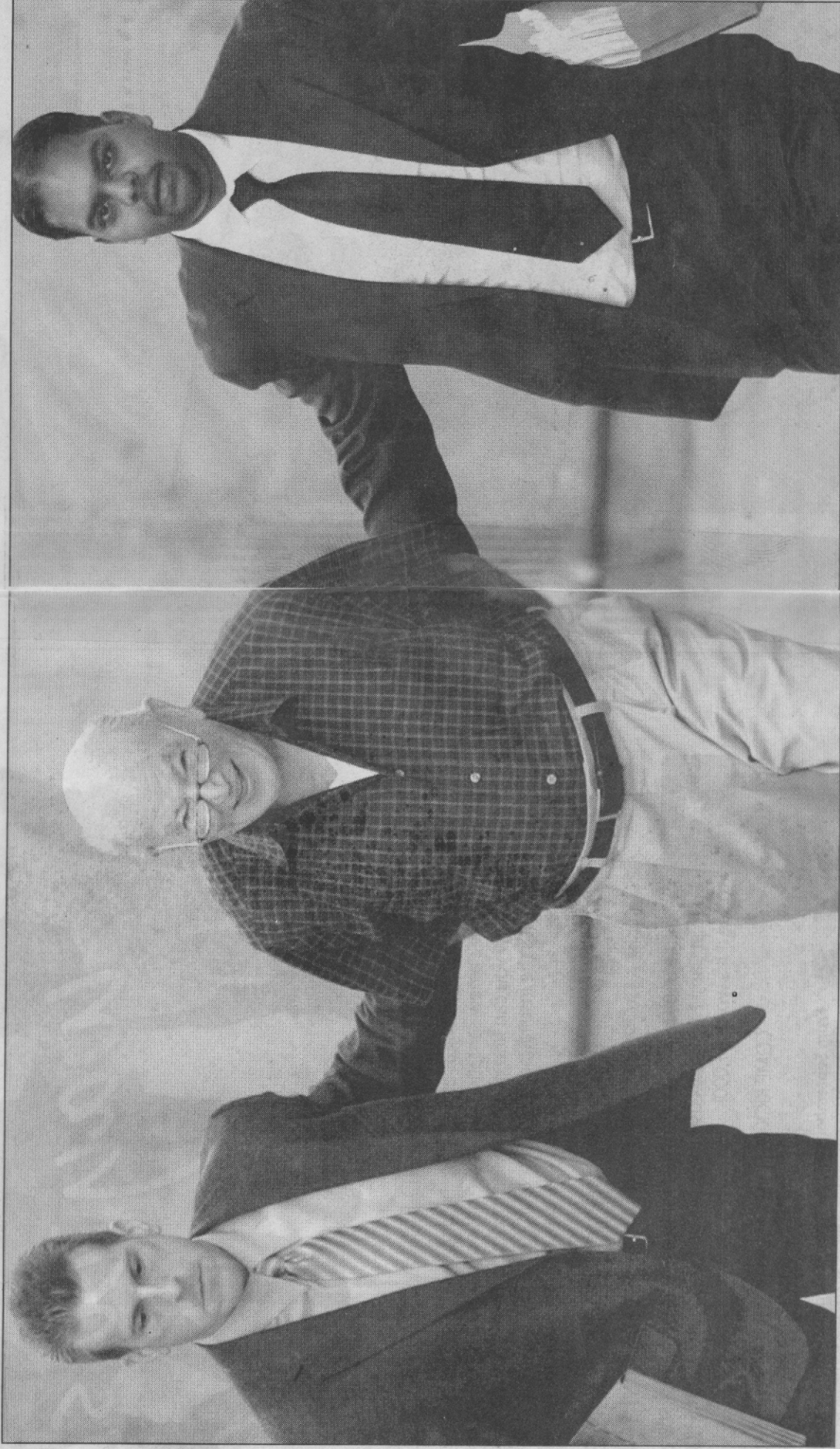


PHOTO BY HOWARD SCHNAPP

Lawrence Aviation Industries owner Gerald Cohen is escorted by federal agents from an FBI office in Melville yesterday morning.

Lawrence Aviation Industries owner Gerald Cohen is escorted by federal agents from an FBI

*Newspaper Sept 8, 2006*



Cohen was released on \$11-million bail. If convicted he faces up to 15 years in prison and fines of more than \$300 million. Some of the toxic waste may have been stored at the site for 20 years, and fines for the illegal storage can run to \$50,000 a day, according to officials.

In a separate civil action, federal prosecutors sued Cohen to pay \$8 million for the current cost of the EPA cleanup operation, as well as future costs. The EPA cleanup also involves the elimination of a plume of contaminated groundwater that has seeped a mile downhill from the site almost to Port Jefferson Harbor.

The few houses located above the plume have been attached to the public water supply. The company was indicted on the same charges as Cohen and also was sued for the \$8 million in the federal civil action.

Lawrence Aviation, which is essentially out of business, has a long history of supplying metals, mainly titanium, for aircraft parts to Grumman and other aviation companies on Long Island.

But the company also had a long history of clashing with local, state and federal authorities because of its almost laudacious treatment of hazardous materials, officials say. Cohen has denied his company was responsible for environmental problems.

In court papers, Lesko said that in the 1980s, the company "routinely disposed of highly flammable titanium shavings, known affectionately at LAI [Lawrence] as 'pixie dust,'" at the Brookhaven landfill. The landfill stopped accepting the shavings after a fire started when the blade on a bulldozer struck shavings, Lesko said.

"Commerce and the economy can co-exist with conservation and ecology, provided people conduct themselves and their businesses lawfully," said Mark Mershon, the head of the FBI in New York.

## ■ Lawrence Aviation owner accused of storing tons of hazardous chemicals in Pt. Jefferson Station

BY ROBERT E. KESSLER  
STAFF WRITER

The owner of one of the most notorious toxic-waste sites on Long Island was arrested yesterday by FBI agents on criminal charges of illegally storing tons of hazardous chemical waste, as well as allowing other pollutants to spew into the air, officials said.

Gerald Cohen, 72, the head of Lawrence Aviation Industries in Port Jefferson Station, was charged with two counts of violating the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act for failing to legally dispose of more than 11 tons of highly caustic alkaline chemicals that had been stored in two large tanks on the 125-acre property along Sheep Pasture Road for possibly as long as 20 years.

Cohen also was charged with one count of violating the Clean

Air Act for allowing two diesel power generators that produced electricity for the company to discharge into the air as much as 440 tons of smog-producing nitrogen oxide between 2001 and 2003, according to Roslynn Mauskopf, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District.

"The site looked like a science-fiction horror movie," until a recent cleanup was begun by the Environmental Protection Agency, said Mark Lesko, the assistant U.S. attorney prosecuting the case.

Cohen, of 38 Bridle Path in St. James, pleaded not guilty at arraignment before U.S. Magistrate Judge E. Thomas Boyle. His attorney, Anthony LaPinta of Hauppauge, declined to comment.

## A legacy of problems

Company's history of violations

**1959** Lawrence Aviation facility opens in Port Jefferson Station, making aircraft parts.

**1970s-80s** On several occasions, health investigators find that contaminants have leaked into groundwater. Cleanup takes two decades.

**1982** Gerald Cohen takes over company from his father.

**2000** Company designated Superfund site, slated for cleanup.

**2003** Health agency reports improperly stored acids, explosive titanium dust and hazardous waste. Some 65 tons of materials are later removed.

**2005** U.S. health agency calls site an "indeterminate public hazard."

**2006** Government outlines cleanup plan. Cohen is arrested in connection with violations.

# Aviation company soars and crashes

BY JAMES BERNSTEIN  
STAFF WRITER

The arrest yesterday of Gerald Cohen brings to an end the long-running and mostly unhappy saga of Lawrence Aviation Industries, a company his father started nearly a half-century ago that was once a powerhouse in Long Island's aerospace and defense business.

But Lawrence Aviation, about a mile from Port Jefferson Harbor, is no more. A Hauppauge builder, Eugene Fernandez, owner of Global Home Group, said yesterday he is in contract to buy the property from Cohen, who was arrested yesterday on environmental charges. Fernandez said he hopes to build homes on the site where as many as 500 people once worked.

Former workers were pleased to learn of Cohen's arrest. "Justice finally prevails," said Bob Jensen of West Islip, who spent 35 years at Lawrence Aviation. "The man hopefully has gotten

his due." Jensen says he the company owes him about \$400,000 in pension and 401(k) money.

Founded in 1959, Lawrence Aviation, which molded titanium slabs into parts for fighter jets such as Grumman Corp's F-14 Tomcat, has been going downhill since the end of the Cold War in 1991. Its demise has accelerated in recent years as complaints about contaminants grew and workers protested that they often were not paid.

Cohen, 72, of St. James, who could not be reached for comment yesterday, took over the company in 1982, when his father, Lawrence, died.

Cohen was well-liked at the company when he first took over, according to associates. Cohen is not viewed as an evil man, but as one who failed to control his company.

Even those who say Cohen owes them money feel this way. "For what he did to me, I hate him" said one former worker. "But in my heart, no, I don't."