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Jury Convicts Businessman Intercepted at O'Hare of Stealing Trade Secrets for New Job with Chinese Rival

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On February 25, 2019, a federal jury in Chicago convicted a longtime employee of a cast-iron manufacturing firm of stealing trade secrets with plans to bring those secrets to his new position with a rival Chinese company. Robert O'Rourke's conviction comes nearly four years after federal authorities intercepted him at O'Hare International Airport before he could board a China-bound flight with the stolen data.

The evidence at trial showed that O'Rourke held various positions throughout his 30-year tenure with Illinois-based Dura-Bar and helped the company develop new business in China and other locations. In late 2013, O'Rourke began negotiations for new employment with a rival firm in Jiangsu, China. While still employed by Dura-Bar, in September 2015, O'Rourke accepted the position of Vice President with the Chinese firm. Before leaving Dura-Bar, O'Rourke used the access provided by his position to download electronic data and documents belonging to Dura-Bar with plans to bring the trade secrets to China.

O'Rourke faces up to 10 years for his conviction on seven counts for theft of trade secrets. United States District Court Judge Andrea R. Wood in the Northern District of Illinois set sentencing for June 3, 2019.

TIP: This case serves as a reminder of the U.S. government's commitment to holding individuals and companies criminally liable for stealing trade secrets, and as a caution to companies to ensure that data security measures are in place to protect against theft from even lifetime employees.

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