

# **Civil Liberties Defense Center**

**Lauren Regan, Attorney & Executive Director**

**259 East 5th Avenue, Suite 300-A**

**Eugene, Oregon 97401**

**(541) 687-9180 Tel**

**(541) 686-2137 Fax**

**Email: [lregan@cldc.org](mailto:lregan@cldc.org)**

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## **Eco-prisoner Jeff “Free” Luers released from prison**

*PORTLAND – Dec 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009* – Jeff “Free” Luers, political prisoner and environmental activist, was released from the Columbia River Correctional Institution this morning after serving nine and half years. Luers was originally sentenced in 2001 to twenty two years and eight months for the politically motivated arson of three SUV's at a car dealership in Eugene, OR. This sentence was deemed grossly disproportionate to the damage sustained by the car dealership and was condemned by legal professionals, human rights groups and activists worldwide. At an appeal hearing in 2007 it was ruled that Luers' original sentence was illegal, and was consequently reduced to ten years.

Luers' release today comes after what Oregon Department of Corrections described as a 'mistake' when they released him early on October 20<sup>th</sup> this year. After a few short hours of freedom, Luers was taken back into custody in Eugene after the State agency reversed its decision and determined that he did not qualify under the new House Bill 3508 for an additional 10% reduction in sentence. DOC's gross incompetence in this situation, and the emotional toll borne by his family and loved ones, is just one of many examples of the distressing levels of bureaucratic impropriety that Luers has endured during his years behind bars.

Upon his release this morning, Mr. Luers stated:

“The last 9½ years have been difficult at best. I have witnessed things in prison that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. I have endured hardship and loss. Without a doubt, this experience has changed me. What hasn't changed is my commitment to environmental and social justice.”

“I would like to thank all the people who have supported me through the years; especially the dedicated few who worked tirelessly to get me out of prison. I look forward to spending time with my loved ones and continuing my education, as well as continuing my activism.”

During his time in prison, seven of which were served in maximum security, Luers has maintained his activism by writing about environmental and social justice issues. In particular, he has continued to bring attention to the specter of human-induced climate change, the cause that motivated Luers to set fire to three SUV's in 2000. Since his original sentencing, awareness of climate change has become omnipresent. It seems ironic that Luers has been released during the Copenhagen Climate Summit where world leaders are converging around the need for extreme action to be taken on global carbon emissions.

<http://www.freejeffluers.org>

Contact: Lauren Regan, Attorney with Civil Liberties Defense Center, for comment or to arrange interviews. 541-687-9180; [info@cldc.org](mailto:info@cldc.org).

### General Background

In June 2001, 23 year-old forest defense activist Jeffrey "Free" Luers was sentenced to 22 years and 8 months in prison for the burning of three Sport Utility Vehicles (SUV's) in Eugene, Oregon. In an attempt to make a statement about global warming, Jeff and his codefendent, Craig 'Critter' Marshall, set fire to 3 SUV's at a Eugene car dealership causing minor property damage. Their stated purpose was to raise awareness about global warming and the role that SUV's play in that process. No one was hurt in this action nor was that the intent. An arson specialist at trial confirmed that the action did not pose any threat to people based on its size and distance from any fuel source. Despite the fact that this action hurt no one, caused only \$40,000 in damages and the cars were later resold, Jeff was sent to prison for a sentence considerably longer than those convicted of murder, kidnapping and rape in Oregon and around the country. Amnesty International declared Luers a political prisoner based upon the egregious disparity in his sentence.

Jeff's appeal was filed in January 2002 and oral arguments before the Oregon Court of Appeals were heard on November 30, 2005. Over a year later, on February 14, 2007 the Court of Appeals unanimously ruled that Jeff's case should be reversed and remanded back to the Circuit Court for resentencing. A year after their decision, a resentencing hearing finally took place on February 28, 2008 in Lane County Circuit Court which reduced Jeff's sentence to 10 years.

On October 1, 2009, the Court signed a supplemental judgment granting Jeff an additional 10% reduction in his total incarceration time, and he was released the next day. Six hours later the prison outrageously took him back into custody due to a "mistake".

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