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ORANGE FIRM PAYS HAZARDOUS WASTE FINE NEW YORK-BASED LEARONAL FACED 15 CHARGES. ITS \$407,302 SETTLEMENT IS CALLED A RECORD.

By MARLA CONE, TIMES STAFF WRITER

A major chemical manufacturer has paid a \$407,302 fine to settle a complaint alleging that it illegally accepted, stored and treated cyanide and other hazardous wastes for six years, state health officials said Friday.

LeaRonal Inc., a New York-based firm that has operated a plant at 642 W. Nicholas Ave. since 1983, had been charged with 15 violations of state hazardous waste laws. The firm manufactures products for the metal-finishing industry.

The settlement, filed in court Thursday by the state attorney general's office, is the largest in Southern California in a state-filed hazardous-waste case, said Allan Hirsch, a spokesman for the state Department of Health Services.

"Illegally storing and treating hazardous waste is a serious problem," he said. "They were operating entirely outside of the regulatory system and we want to make sure people know this is a completely unacceptable situation."

LeaRonal's attorney, **Barry Groveman**, said Friday that the company did not admit any wrongdoing in agreeing to pay the penalty, which was based on fees LeaRonal would have paid if it had obtained six years of permits.

Groveman said the New York company was confused by California hazardous-waste laws and bureaucracy, which he said is "absolutely out of control."

"LeaRonal pays enormous attention to environmental issues," said Groveman, formerly the chief environmental prosecutor for the Los Angeles County district attorney's office. "The company didn't even know they had to do this because in other states they don't have to."

State health officials said LeaRonald failed to obtain permits for handling cyanide and other hazardous waste. Without the permits, state officials said, they could not ensure the dangerous chemicals were safely handled.

"By not obtaining a permit, LeaRonald circumvented a process that protects public health and the environment. That is a serious violation of the law," Kenneth W. Kizer, state health director, said in a statement.

No contamination was found on the property, but Hirsch said "short of actual contamination, this is the most serious hazardous-waste violation that a company can commit."

The company was also accused in the complaint of storing hazardous materials sloppily, sometimes in open containers or in improperly labeled drums.

Health department officials said the company has been illegally treating its own wastes since 1983 and began illegally accepting wastes from other companies in 1986. About 15,000 gallons were accepted over a 1 1/2-year period from the end of 1986 until 1988, they said.