

Blind Hoover Dam vendors not required to pay fees

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CARSON CITY — Blind vendors operating at Hoover Dam will not have to pay fees to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, according to a federal panel's decision in an arbitration complaint announced Wednesday by the Nevada attorney general's office.

Blind vendors operate three businesses at Hoover Dam and two of those businesses asked to be moved to a new location at the popular tourist attraction in 1995.

The Reclamation Bureau refused the request, however, unless the vendors agreed to pay commissions and only operate for 10 years.

Attorney General Frankie Sue Del Papa filed a complaint

against the bureau, saying a federal law gives blind business vendors the priority to operate on federal property for an indefinite period of time. The law also does not allow the collection of rent or fees.

The bureau argued it was exempt from the federal law.

An arbitration panel appointed by the U.S. Department of Education conducted a hearing on the complaint in November 1995.

Their decision, received Wednesday by the attorney general's office, said it was economically feasible for the two vendors to operate at a parking ramp opened last year as part of the new visitors center without paying a commission.

"This decision is an example that government agencies,

including the federal government, must obey the law," Del Papa said.

In a separate legal issue, the panel also awarded 30 percent of the profits from vending machines located within the Hoover Dam power plant since 1975 to the Nevada Bureau of Services to the Blind.

Deputy Attorney General John Albrecht said federal law requires some of the profits from vending machines in competition with blind vendors to be dedicated to blind services. The attorney general's office didn't realize the machines were being used until the complaint was filed, he said.

The amount due, to be determined by the bureau, will be forwarded to the state at a later date, Albrecht said.