

Department of Mental Health, Coalinga State Hospital

Investigations of Improper Activities by State Employees, February 2007 Through June 2007

INVESTIGATION I2006-1099 (REPORT I2007-2), SEPTEMBER 2007

Department of Mental Health's response as of October 2008

We investigated and substantiated the allegation that the Department of Mental Health (Mental Health) violated provisions of state law that require a state agency to justify its need to purchase motor vehicles and to receive prior approval for the purchase from the Department of General Services (General Services).

Finding: Mental Health misused and wasted state funds by purchasing law enforcement vehicles and using them for non-law enforcement purposes, failed to maintain accurate home-storage permits, and failed to maintain required mileage logs.

In seeking approval from General Services, Mental Health indicated that it intended to use two 2005 Ford Crown Victoria Police Interceptors (Police Interceptors) for law enforcement purposes. However, after it received approval and purchased the vehicles, the Coalinga State Hospital (hospital) misused state funds and violated state law when it assigned the Police Interceptors first to its general motor pool and later to three hospital officials, who used them for non-law enforcement purposes including commuting. General Services indicated that it would not have approved the purchases of the Police Interceptors had it known how they would be used.

Additionally, we found that the purchase of the Police Interceptors was wasteful because Mental Health paid between \$18,682 and \$19,640 more to purchase the two Police Interceptors than it would have for two light-class sedans.

Also in violation of a state regulation, the hospital did not accurately list the officials' addresses on home-storage permits, thus failing to disclose that two of the officials used the Police Interceptors to commute between 390 and 980 miles per week. Further, the three hospital officials did not maintain the required mileage logs for the Police Interceptors they drove.

Mental Health's Action: Corrective action taken.

Mental Health stated that hospital management erred when it assigned the vehicles to the motor pool and subsequently to the officials who were not entitled to use law enforcement vehicles. It reported that hospital officials have been assigned light-class vehicles for business use only. In January 2008 Mental Health informed us that it had transferred the two Police Interceptors to another state hospital to be used for law enforcement purposes. As of October 2008 Mental Health stated that the Police Interceptors are still in use at the other state hospital.

Investigative Highlight . . .

The Department of Mental Health misused state funds designated to purchase two law enforcement vehicles by using the vehicles for non-law enforcement purposes.

Regarding the home-storage permits and the vehicle mileage logs, Mental Health stated that the long commutes to the officials' "home" residences were inappropriate. It also reported that it had taken measures to ensure that all home-storage permits were accurate. Mental Health further reported in October 2008 that employees at all Mental Health hospitals who are assigned state vehicles maintain vehicle mileage logs and ensure that home-storage permits are accurate.

Finally, Mental Health also reported that two of the officials retired and the remaining official was transferred to a lower-level position at another hospital.