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Prosecutor: SFPD ignored tech's unreliability

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(04-14) 19:09 PDT SAN FRANCISCO --

San Francisco's top narcotics prosecutor

complained about Deborah Madden's "disturbing" behavior before the police crime lab technician came under suspicion of stealing drug evidence, according to documents that also reveal the prosecutor feared police supervisors weren't taking steps to control her.

Assistant District Attorney Sharon Woo wrote in a newly released Nov. 19 e-mail that chronic staff shortages at the police drug analysis unit, and in particular Madden's failure at times to show up to testify in court, were jeopardizing narcotics cases.

Woo said she had spoken repeatedly with the head of the crime lab about Madden, and that officials there believed Madden was unhappy in her job and was intentionally sabotaging the lab's drug analysis unit.

"The situation at the crime lab is becoming ridiculous," Woo told Chief Assistant District Attorney Russ Giuntini in her e-mail, which was among hundreds of pages of Police Department and district attorney's office documents that a judge ordered Tuesday to be turned over to defense attorneys in drug cases.

Giuntini, however, did not pass along Woo's frustrations about Madden to top Police Department officials, the documents show. Giuntini, No. 2 in the district attorney's office to Kamala Harris, cited the short-staffing issue at the drug unit in a Nov. 24 memo to Assistant Police Chief Kevin Cashman, but did not mention Madden or Woo's concerns about her.

Treated for alcoholism

Madden, 60, who had worked as a crime technician for 29 years, went on leave from the lab Dec. 8 and entered alcoholism treatment. That same month, her sister contacted the lab and reported suspicions that Madden was taking drug evidence to her San Mateo home.