



SAN FRANCISCO POLICE DEPARTMENT
MEDIA RELATIONS UNIT
MEDIA ADVISORY

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10-9

Police Chief George Gascón will conduct a press conference today, Tuesday, March 9, at the Hall of Justice, Room 551, at 6:30 P.M. The purpose of the press conference will be to discuss a recent investigation initiated by the San Francisco Police Department regarding the handling of narcotic evidence by a San Francisco Crime Laboratory Technician.

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Chief George Gascón – Statement on Crime Lab

In late 2009, the San Francisco Police Department began an inquiry into possible mishandling of narcotic evidence at the Department's crime lab. The Department had received information indicating that a civilian crime lab employee **who is not a peace officer** may have taken narcotics for personal use.

As a result of an internal audit and other information, on February 22nd, the Special Investigations Division commenced a criminal investigation. On February 23rd, the Department met with the District Attorney's Office to advise them of the investigation. On February 26th, investigators in our Special Investigations Division interviewed the employee, (a former criminalist), regarding these violations. As part of this investigation, on March 3rd, a search warrant was served by the Department on the employee. That day, the former employee was arrested in San Mateo County by the San Mateo county sheriff's department on charges of possession of a firearm in violation of a restraining order in an unrelated case. There may be further charges.

During the course of the Department's interview with this civilian employee, the employee made allegations about practices in the Crime Lab that do not meet professional standard.

In a comprehensive briefing today, I have learned of the results of this investigation and the allegations of unprofessional practices made by this employee.

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I stress that the allegations by this employee, who is a civilian and not a peace officer, are uncorroborated. And at this juncture I believe that the evidence points to any discrepancies as being isolated to this one civilian employee.

While the Department does not, at this time, have evidence to prove that the allegations made regarding the handling of narcotic evidence are in fact accurate or widespread, we have taken steps to validate the credibility of the Lab.

This includes the temporary suspension of controlled substance testing at the Crime Lab, effective today's date, so that an audit can be immediately undertaken to ascertain whether there is any merit to the allegations by the retired employee.

I must point out that what I am bringing to the public's attention does not involve the fabrication of evidence, but rather appears to involve very small amounts of narcotics being removed without authorization from evidence containers.

There is no question that the substances certified as being controlled substances were in fact controlled substances.

While this comprehensive audit is underway, we will be utilizing external crime lab services. This audit is being undertaken out of an abundance of caution, so that the Crime Lab can resume its critical functions as soon as is practical. We are working with the District Attorney and other criminal justice system entities to

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ensure that potentially affected criminal cases are reviewed and where necessary, that evidence is re-tested, to ensure that no compromising of evidence has taken place.

In light of this incident, the Department will be revisiting existing policies and procedures at the Crime Lab to ensure that evidence collection, testing, storage, and destruction, is conducted consistent with industry “best practices.”

We want to ensure that workplace practices for evidence used in prosecutions is maximally safeguarded from mishandling or misuse. This will include restrictions on access to the evidence lockers of each analyst working in the Crime Lab.

We have reached out to the American Society of Crime Lab Directors and the California Association of Crime Lab Directors for their assistance in conducting an independent audit of the Crime Lab. Once the audit is complete and we have assurance that all industry standards are being met, we will re-open the Controlled Substances Section of the Crime Lab. The audit team will also be reviewing the practices of the other Crime Lab Sections. In the interim, we have been offered Crime Lab services assistance from the Alameda County Sheriff, the San Mateo County Sheriff, the Oakland Police Department, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

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The Department's Crime Lab is in the process of being re-accredited. As part of this process, an assessment of Crime Lab operations was recently done by the American Society of Crime Lab Directors. A draft report of this assessment points out several areas where the Crime Lab can make improvements in its practices concerning the Crime Lab's processing of controlled substances. We intend to act swiftly on these recommendations so as to preserve the integrity of the testing process.