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Radar whistleblower sues state

Says he's punished for telling the truth

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The state inspector general's office has launched a probe into whether the Pennsylvania State Police covered up problems with its Genesis hand-held radar gun, sources said.

Meanwhile, the technician who revealed problems with the gun has filed a civil suit against the state police, saying the agency has retaliated against him for his disclosures.

Earlier this month the Daily News reported that state troopers have written thousands of speeding tickets since discovering the radar gun sometimes gives erroneous speed readings when used in certain Ford Crown Victorias.

Last September, Tim Shingara, who then oversaw the maintenance and performance of the state police radar equipment, was subpoenaed to testify in a Cumberland County court trial.

Shingara testified that the radar gun sometimes malfunctions when plugged into the cigarette lighter of a 2003 or 2004 Ford Crown Victoria - the primary state police patrol car. When it malfunctions, the gun reads the alternator whine and not the radar signal, he said, and gives false speed readings in the 70-mph range.

Decatur Electronics, the maker of the gun, acknowledged the problem and recommended a fix, he testified.

In a lawsuit filed last week against the state police, Shingara says his employer has retaliated against him for his testimony - a violation of his First Amendment rights, he says.

"I was subpoenaed to testify, and I told the truth," Shingara, 55, said yesterday. "The gun will work fine in one car, and in another it won't. They should either fix these guns or stop using them."

The suit lists as defendants state police officials Kathy Skiles, Wesley Waugh and Ralph Periandi; Cumberland County Assistant District Attorney Jaime Keating, and Robert Sanner, president of Decatur Electronics. None could be reached for comment last night.

The lawsuit says that after Shingara testified on Sept. 4, his boss, Skiles, "jabbed him in the chest threatening him that he would be 'fired' because of his testimony."

After the story broke in the Daily News, Keating and Sanner portrayed him as a "disgruntled employee" to other members of the media and public, the lawsuit says. At the same time, Shingara has been under a gag order to prevent him from speaking out, the suit says.

"The state police are punishing an innocent person whose only crime was to tell the truth in a court of law," Don Bailey, Shingara's attorney, said yesterday.

Shingara has been subjected to an "unlawful" internal investigation for his testimony and is awaiting punishment, the lawsuit says. His radar duties were stripped from him, and he has been intentionally deprived of meaningful work, the suit says.

"This is the same old pattern the state police are using," Bailey said. "They're setting him up to terminate him or injure him."

In the meantime, the state police still haven't fixed the problems with the gun and "continue to let people be charged with traffic offenses that they didn't commit," Bailey said.