



Posted on Thu, Apr. 22, 2004

State police suspend tech who revealed radar problems

He had testified that gun malfunctions

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The Pennsylvania State Police yesterday suspended the radar technician who revealed problems with the Genesis hand-held radar gun in a criminal trial last September.

Tim Shingara, who had been in charge of the department's radar maintenance and performance of the state police radar equipment until his testimony, was suspended for 30 working days without pay and without benefits.

Last month, Shingara filed a civil suit against the state police, saying they had retaliated against him for his radar gun disclosures, which violates his 1st Amendment rights.

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

The department then investigated how he came to testify in that trial but ultimately cleared him, sources said.

Shingara subsequently faxed an anonymous complaint against Skiles, director of the Technical Support Division, where he worked.

The complaint said that 23 people had left the division during her two-year tenure, that she is a bad supervisor and that morale is bad, sources said. It was anonymous because the state police are required to investigate all anonymous complaints, sources said.

Internal affairs investigators traced the fax number to a store in a local strip mall then, based on physical descriptions from employees, determined that Shingara faxed the complaint.

Shingara's complaint was ruled "unfounded" and internal affairs, in turn, launched an investigation into Shingara for insubordination, untruthfulness and defamation for making the allegations against Skiles, sources said.

The 30-day suspension is the most severe punishment the state police have before firing someone.

Trooper Linette Quinn, spokesman for State Police Commissioner Jeffrey Miller, declined to comment.

Samuel Walker, a national expert on police corruption, said Shingara's case highlights why police agencies need to protect employees who come forward about wrongdoing within their workplace.

"While I don't have all the facts, it looks very bad," Walker said. "It looks like he's being punished for his attempt to do the right thing. This appears to be a classic case of retaliation against a whistleblower - searching around and coming up with some pretext or another for punishment or discipline rather than going after him for his radar testimony."

Last month, the Daily News reported that Pennsylvania state troopers have written thousands of speeding tickets since discovering the Genesis hand-held radar gun sometimes give erroneous speed readings when used in certain Ford Crown Victorias.

The story was based on Shingara's testimony from the criminal trial in Cumberland County.

Shingara, who was subpoenaed, 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.

After his testimony, Shingara's radar duties were stripped from him. Shingara, 55, had held the position for 12 years.

Miller and Decatur Electronics, the maker of the gun, insist that an internal override within the gun corrects the problem Shingara described in his testimony.

The state inspector general's office has launched a probe into whether the state police have covered up the problems with the gun.

