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Agencies Examining Claim Officers Stole From Suspect

Attorneys: Members Of Task Force Took Cash From Safe

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NEW ORLEANS -- Officials with police agencies in three parishes are reviewing claims that members of a specialized anti-crime task force stole thousands of dollars from the home of a drug suspect.

The investigations are focused in part on surveillance video that shows undercover officers leading Stefen Daigle to his French Quarter home, then emerging with what appears to be a paper sack, getting into an SUV and driving off.

The reports documenting the January 2011 arrest of Daigle do not indicate that the task force took him to his apartment and make no reference to the bag or its contents. They note only that Daigle was picked up at his Mid-City art studio where, according to records reviewed by the I-Team, the officers found drugs and related paraphernalia.

The charges against Daigle were dropped, however, last Friday, when the Orleans Parish District Attorney's Office was made aware of what a spokesman called "new evidence."

On Monday, New Orleans' independent police monitor, Susan Hutson, told WDSU that she is reviewing the matter.

Hutson noted that, in the video, the suspect does not appear to be handcuffed as he was led to his home on St. Peter Street. That would be a deviation from procedure, she said.

She also said her office would try to find answers to the omissions from the arrest report and supporting documents.

"It's not documented in the report at all, and that raises issues about the officers being forthcoming," she said. "You can't prosecute people when you don't document what you are doing. I'm very concerned about that."

The officer who signed off on the report, Det. Ray Veit, is a member of the NOPD. For that reason, both Hutson and the department's Public Integrity Bureau are reviewing the case.

Veit was part of the West Bank Major Crimes Task Force, which includes officers from three area parishes. It was that task force that arrested Daigle.

In addition to the investigations in New Orleans, the Gretna Police Department is also examining the matter. Chief Arthur Lawson has asked Daigle's attorneys to share video and documents related to

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their claims.

In Plaquemines Parish, sheriff's officials are reviewing the police report.

The Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office also had a deputy assigned to the case, though it was not clear on Monday if the department had taken any action.

"All of the jurisdictions involved have a duty to make sure their officers are doing what is right," Hutson said.

None of the members of the task force who were involved in the arrest have been suspended or otherwise reprimanded.

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