

Port Security Dive Team Overtime Slammed By Auditor

By Harry Saltzgaver
Executive Editor

An audit initiated by the city auditor and a change in management has put the Port of Long Beach Security Division Dive Team on a tighter leash, according to City Auditor Laura Doud.

Doud presented the audit last week to the City Council and port officials. She said this week that the study began when a computer programmed to flag excessive overtime pointed to the Harbor Department's security arm.

"We've been doing these types of audits proactively for some time," Doud said. "We did the audit of the police department when overtime skyrocketed. After the report came out and they implemented our recommendations, the overtime went from \$12 million one year to \$8 million the next."

Doud said the computer program showed that overtime was high in harbor security generally, and even higher in patrol than it was for the dive team. But overtime in patrol had some explanation, she said, while there was no apparent reason for overtime with the divers.

"There was essentially no oversight with the divers," Doud said. "About 40% of their work days were attributed to dives, but there were usually two work dives and 13 training dives in a week. And there was no documentation of the training."

"Ultimately, they couldn't account for 65% of the dive team's time... There was talk of maintenance of equipment, but no plan."

Doud said that the team had a regular work week of four days, Tuesday-Friday, with 10 hours a day. But they were regularly scheduled to work Monday as well, with all of those hours as overtime.

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-Laura Doud

"The patrol has a ton of overtime because of the nature of their job," Doud said. "But it appears to us that the divers could help with patrol during their regular schedule, and that's the recommendation we made."

Doud's cover letter to Port Executive Director Richard Steinke about the audit said that security division management initially made it difficult to get complete records and other information. She warned that pertinent information might have been missed due to a lack of cooperation.

But Director of Security Cosmo Perrone retired in the middle of the audit. Doud said Monday that his departure directly led to better cooperation with her office.

"There was a significant change in division management towards the end of our review and subsequent communications with these individuals has been very positive," Doud's cover letter says. "Management appears to be making the necessary changes that will strengthen controls and provide appropriate oversight of dive team personnel. We have requested, and Harbor has agreed, to provide an update in six months on their progress in implementing our recommendations."

Doud told the council members that she would provide them with another report after that update.