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Ex-LB staffer accused of theft

CRIME: Animal Care Bureau worker for 21 years charged with embezzling more than \$250,000.

By Tracy Manzer Staff Writer

LONG BEACH — A former city employee was arrested Thursday and charged with multiple felony counts of allegedly embezzling more than a quarter of a million dollars in public funds from the Long Beach Animal Care Services Bureau, authorities announced.

Jongluck "Lucky" Mutrais, 59, was charged Wednesday with nine counts: one count of misappropriation of public funds, one count of altering or falsifying an account, one count of embezzlement by public officer and six counts of filing false income tax returns, according to the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office.

A warrant was issued that same day, and Mutrais was arrested by Long Beach police at her home in Orange on Thursday morning, police and prosecutors said.

According to the criminal complaint, Mutrais — who worked with the Animal Care Bureau for 21 years — took more than \$250,000 during an 11-month period, between Oct. 1, 2009, and Sept. 1, 2010.

Deputy District Attorney Dana Arantani, of the Public Integrity Division, said investigators estimated that, over the course of Mutrais' employment with the department, she misappropriated "hundreds of thousands of dollars in addition to the \$251,000" included in the criminal complaint.

The theft came to light in August 2010, after the Animal Care Services Bureau implemented a comprehensive computer system to track funds, according to prosecutors.

Mutrais resigned from her job in September 2010, according to the Long Beach Police

EMBEZZLE

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Department.

Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud said Thursday that the embezzlement was uncovered by an audit done by her department, and she released portions of the audit following the announcement of Mutrais' arrest.

The October 2011 report, previously kept confidential because of the criminal investigation, determined that in the 11 months reviewed, \$253,150 in revenue was missing.

Since the audit was completed, the city has taken a number of steps to address problems that contributed to the theft, including the transfer of the Animal Care Bureau from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine, according to the City Auditor's Office.

The Animal Care Services Bureau is responsible for the intake of stray and surrendered animals, field and kennel operations, animal abuse investigations, pet licensing, low-cost pet care services, and other related operations.

authorities said.

Doud noted the theft was possible because the suspect was handling funds without any supervision.

"As the city continues with cuts to the budget and the possibility of eliminating staff, this instance heightens the importance of ensuring proper controls are in place," Doud said in written statement.

The city auditor also noted the importance of improved technology, which helped authorities identify and track funds stolen during the 11-month period.

Mutrais was expected to be arraigned today in Department 30 of the Downtown Los Angeles Central Courthouse, police and prosecutors said.

She was being held in lieu of \$500,000 bail Thursday. If convicted on all counts, she could face up to nine years in state prison, according to prosecutors.

The investigation remains open, police added. Anyone with information is urged to call the Long Beach Police Department Forgery/Fraud Detail at 562-570-7330. Anonymous tips can be sent via text or email at www.tipsoft.com.

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