

Police webmaster fired for watching porn at work

Contributed by ELGIN JONES

FORT LAUDERDALE — The Fort Lauderdale Police Department's webmaster has been suspended and is slated to be fired next week after spending much of his time at work looking at explicit, pornographic websites.

Steven Rocky Loiacono, 42, of Coral Springs, has been on unpaid suspension from the \$90,729.60-a-year job since July 14, pending his final termination on Monday, Aug. 11.

His termination follows a two-month police Internal Affairs investigation that showed he spent a "significant" amount of time at work viewing hardcore pornographic sites.

The Police Department did not conduct a criminal investigation into the matter.

He also used programs designed to camouflage and hide the activity, the report states, adding that he intentionally deleted information from city computers to cover his tracks.

Loiacono was hired on April 9, 2001. He worked in the Police Department, maintaining its website and managing the department's technology information program.

He could not be reached for comment.

During his initial testimony to investigators on May 5, however, Loiacono acknowledged visiting graphic pornographic and sexually explicit sites for a few hours per week, but said it was inadvertent while he was working on a recruiting project for the department's website.

"When I would go to a site and I would see something that would, that just read 'www.inappropriatesexualcontent.com,' I wouldn't visit those sites," he told investigators. "I would see they would be something that would be inappropriate or wouldn't be something that I would necessarily wanna visit."

Nevertheless, the police department says Loiacono's frequent visiting of porn sites was a firing offense.

"You are hereby notified that you are being suspended and dismissed from City employment as a Customer Support Administrator in the Police Department," Police Chief Frank Adderley wrote to Loiacono in a July 14 memo. "Your suspension, without pay, for twenty (20) days is effective immediately and your dismissal from City service will be effective at the close of business on Monday, August 11, 2008."

City personnel policies prohibit employees from using city equipment to view such materials.

Internal city records offer a detailed account of what unfolded during a nine-month period from July 2007 to April 2008, when a co-worker detected Loiacono's Internet habits.

Edward "Jay" Stacy, a technical services manager, first noticed evidence that Loiacono had been accessing pornographic sites on city computers in April.

Using an Internet software program titled Websense, which is manufactured by a San Diego, Ca. technology security firm, Stacy ran several reports on Loiacono to determine what sites he had visited.

"The thing that alarmed me the most was the proxy avoidance sites because those sites have a sole purpose and that purpose is to hide Internet activity from software like this [Websense]," Stacy told investigators.

After realizing that dozens of hardcore pornographic sites had been accessed, Stacy alerted his supervisor, Mark Blanco, director of the Police Department's Information Management Division, who then turned the matter over to Internal Affairs for investigation.

"I was called by Jay Stacy [Manager of Technical Services] that we had a potential problem and he wasn't, he didn't know if we were working on something and I said, "No, IT (Information Technology) does not work on any of this type of activity that, that would be the Detective Bureau," Blanco said in a sworn statement given to investigators on May 20.

Blanco also testified that it was Loiacono's job to keep the department's computers from accessing such sites, and that he fully understood how certain software could be used to track Internet activity.

Det. Karl Maracotta is a 19-year veteran investigator with the Fort Lauderdale Police Department who specializes in computer and information technology. He has been assigned to the department's Information Management Division for the past 13 years.

Maracotta testified that Loiacono had made extensive use of HideBehind.com, a website that specializes in hardcore, gay videos, and is designed to conceal Internet activity. Access to HideBehind.com can only be granted to individuals who have set up accounts with passwords.

Maracotta found that based on the large bandwidths of time Loiacono spent on HideBehind.com, "that either a very large file was downloaded or streaming video may have been viewed."

Maracotta also discovered that the Internet histories on the two computers used by Loiacono had been purposely deleted.

"There are many examples you can give, but truly when you look at the scope and I should say magnitude of the amount of sites here, it indicates to me that there was no official business or reason for accessing these sites," Maracotta said during questioning by investigators. "It would not be part of one's scope of work within Information Systems."

Under the federal "Garrity Rule," which compels police department employees to give sworn testimony about job-related matters for possible disciplinary action, but which cannot be used for criminal prosecution, Loiacono was ordered to submit to questioning from investigators about his Internet activity, under oath.

During his initial testimony on May 5, Loiacono acknowledged visiting graphic porn sites for a few hours a week, but said he was working on a recruiting project for the department's website at the time.

On June 2, however, he was required to answer questions again during a follow-up session with investigators. There, he was presented with a more detailed Websense report, and the testimony from both Maracotta and his supervisor, Blanco.

Those reports showed he spent what is described as a "significant" amount of time at work viewing dozens of websites that contained graphic, sexually explicit videos and other hardcore materials.

"There was no reason for me to go on the Internet and look at pornographic sites," Loiacono then acknowledged to Sgt. Rodrick McGowan.

Loiacono denied he attempted to conceal his Internet activity. He said he only reduced the amount of time that the history of the sites he visited was stored on his computers. He said he did so to conserve space on the hard drives.

The Internal Affairs report concluded otherwise.

"Testimony and evidence indicated Mr. Loiacono's access to unauthorized Internet sites were deliberate and sites categorized as "proxy avoidance" were accessed purposely in an effort to conceal his Internet activity," the report's conclusion states.

Despite his suspension and pending termination on Monday, Loiacono was still listed as the city's webmaster on the Police Department's website earlier this week. Also, his email address was still listed as that of the webmaster.

"He's terminated," Police Department spokesman Sgt. Frank Sousa said. "They are in the process of transitioning, so obviously the website is not being updated as much."

EJones@SFLTimes.com

Photo: Steven Rocky Loiacono