

Fire marshal quits amid investigation

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Correction (6/29/04): Tampa attorney Brian Gonzalez is representing former Hillsborough Fire Marshal Donald Goff, who retired while being investigated by the FBI in connection with Internet crimes. A story Sunday gave an incorrect first name for Gonzalez.

Hillsborough Fire Marshal Donald Goff walked out of a convention in St. Pete Beach on Monday, drove to department headquarters on E Hanna Avenue and announced that he was retiring, effective immediately.

"He requested to retire effective that day in lieu of bringing any discredit on the department," spokesman Ray Yeakley said.

On Wednesday, Goff's attorney explained: Goff was being investigated by the FBI in connection with Internet crimes.

He "said it was inappropriate use of a home computer," Yeakley said. "He didn't say what it entailed. It could be a number of things."

FBI investigators confiscated a computer from Goff's Riverview home. They have not seized his work computer.

"It appears to be all off-duty and nothing that would have interfered with his employment," Yeakley said. "The FBI would have confiscated (Goff's work computer) if they had suspected" he was using it inappropriately.

Goff, a 16-year veteran of Hillsborough County Fire Rescue who earned about \$85,000 a year as fire marshal, will receive his full pension and benefits, Yeakley said. He said he did not know how much that is.

However, if charges are filed against Goff, the Florida Retirement System could strip him of some of those benefits.

The system administers the department's pensions.

Although the FBI did not take Goff's work computer, the county's information and technology services division plans to inspect it, Yeakley said.

"At this point, it's just allegations," he said. "There haven't been (any) charges filed at this point."

This isn't the first time Goff has had a brush with the law. In August, Hillsborough County sheriff's deputies arrested him on S U.S. 301 and Gibsonton Drive on a driving under the influence charge. Goff refused a blood alcohol test. He posted \$250 bail and was released from jail.

FBI spokeswoman Sarah Oates did not return a message left at her Tampa office.

Neither did Mike Gonzalez, the attorney representing Goff. Attempts to reach Goff also were unsuccessful.

Yeakley said the department will move forward.

"One person does not make or break a department," he said. "Our service will continue to be top-notch regardless of one person's actions."

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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