

Top cops blamed in ex-chief's stop

By PAUL LaROCCO | The Press-Enterprise

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Riverside's city manager placed clear blame Tuesday on police leadership for the handling of a traffic stop involving the heavily intoxicated former chief, though he failed to single out any individual.

Brad Hudson said "mistakes were made" in a statement released after 5:30 p.m., and hinted at corrective action for those who made the decision to drive Russ Leach home Feb. 8 without arrest or a sobriety test.

[City manager's statement over former chief's traffic stop](#)

"Failures to take reasonable action occurred exclusively in the management ranks," Hudson wrote.

Leach, whose medical retirement was granted this week, had consumed 11 drinks and up to five prescription drugs before leaving a strip club in his city-issued Chrysler 300. When he was stopped, the car was riding on its rims and he could not remember what happened.

Under normal protocol, Hudson said, police would have conducted a field sobriety test, taken blood, breath or urine samples and made an arrest. He noted, however, that patrol officers acted appropriately by notifying their supervisor.

From there, phone records show that a lieutenant traded several calls with Assistant Chief John De La Rosa. Leach was then driven home and a handwritten report was filed omitting many details later revealed in an independent probe by the California Highway Patrol.

Hudson said policy and procedure changes will be enacted to avoid preferential treatment for any city or police leaders involved in future DUI investigations. But he did not specify what those actions would be.

The findings came on the same day that the Police Department's third-in-command announced he will retire after more than 30 years of service. Deputy Chief Pete Esquivel will depart May 7, leaving both deputy chief positions in the force vacant.

De La Rosa continues to serve as interim chief, while one captain and six lieutenant positions remain unfilled. The totality of the openings worries the police union.

"The leadership positions are most critical," said Cliff Mason, president of the Riverside Police Officers Association. "Allowing those positions to go unfilled or unfunded is unacceptable from our viewpoint."

Also on Tuesday, Leach officially completed the home monitoring program he was sentenced to as part of his DUI conviction. Based on standard time-served credits, the monitoring was reduced from 30 to 15 days. He remains on probation.

In addition to \$2,150 in fines assessed by the court, Leach has also paid the city nearly \$10,000 for damage to his Chrysler 300. The Department of Motor Vehicles may also suspend his driver license, but it wasn't immediately clear if that action has been taken.

Leach will collect roughly half of his \$241,000 salary through the medical retirement approved by the city and the state pension board. That is not affected by his misdemeanor conviction.

Staff writers Cassie MacDuff and Alicia Robinson contributed to this report.

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