

District Attorney

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Report on alleged irregularities in DA's office due

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A report on alleged financial irregularities in the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's office is in the works and should be released next week, county Auditor Gary Knutson said this morning.

The key allegation is that District Attorney Art Danner gave attorney Catherine Gardner a notice of intent to dismiss, then kept her on the payroll for three months before the firing was final.

Gardner was paid for those three months, but wasn't required to come to work. She charged that Danner kept her on the payroll to keep her quiet during his campaign for re-election in June; Danner said he was trying to work out a settlement.

Gardner was dismissed for admitting to ingesting a white powder she thought was cocaine; she said it was under duress from an abusive boyfriend. Gardner appealed the dismissal, and the Civil Service Commission upheld the firing.

Knutson has prepared a confidential draft of the report for Danner, but wouldn't say what's in it. He said he wants responses from Danner's office before making the report public.

Danner has been cooperative with the auditor's office, Knutson said.

Danner could be asked to repay about \$30,000 that the county paid to Gardner. Danner wouldn't say this morning if that's part of the preliminary draft, calling any discussion of it "premature."

Knutson is also looking into the cases of Jon Rivers, a former part-time research attorney for the district attorney's office. After he stopped working for the district's attorney's office, Rivers was paid \$1,600.

Danner said today that there was no question that Rivers worked not only the hours paid for, but additional hours he wasn't paid for. Even if the time card procedures weren't all followed, the money paid was justified, Danner said.