

Posted on Thu, Dec. 09, 2004

## Rendell: What problem with radar?

Gov. denies cover-up by State Police

By NICOLE WEISENSEE EGAN  
[weisenn@phillynews.com](mailto:weisenn@phillynews.com)

GOV. RENDELL yesterday denied that Pennsylvania State Police covered up problems with their radar guns, rather than fix them.

"The bottom line is that the guns are completely accurate when used by trained personnel and aimed at a moving vehicle," said Kate Philips, Rendell's spokeswoman.

Jack Lewis, a state police spokesman, also continued to deny the coverup allegations, despite extensive internal state police documentation that lays out the details of the coverup.

The *Daily News*, citing hundreds of newly released internal state police documents, reported yesterday that the state police rejected an offer from Decatur Electronics, the gun's manufacturer, to fix the guns for free to keep the problem secret.

The state police feared the public would challenge speeding tickets, resulting in a loss of revenue, if word got out that the guns needed fixing, the documents show. Samuel Walker, an expert in police corruption, said "Radargate" appears similar to the state police's sexual misconduct scandal.

"Whenever they have evidence of problems, their response is to cover it up," Walker said. "I think refusing to accept the manufacturer's offer to fix them for free is just reprehensible."

Since September 2003, Kroll Associates, an international security firm, has been monitoring how the state police handle sexual misconduct in its ranks. Kroll's final report is due this month. Its contract expires at the end of the year.

Philips said Rendell won't decide whether to renew Kroll's contract or expand its mission until he reads the final report.

Walker said Rendell needs to take two steps: temporarily extend Kroll's contract and expand its mission to include other issues, like the radar gun coverup; and establish a permanent, independent watchdog for the state police.

"The key to improving policing is organizational change, not just investigating and punishing individuals, which is relatively ineffective," said Walker, whose latest book, "The New World of Police Accountability," comes out next month.

The state inspector general put together a report on the radar gun coverup, gave it to Rendell in April but no one will release it to the public.

The state police did release a favorable report, from the University of Pittsburgh, on the radar gun last month and are still using it to support their claims that the gun works fine.

However, the report contradicts findings by the state police; Decatur Electronics; four state-certified labs and Motorola, which issued a report for the state police.

All concluded that the Genesis hand-held radar gun, powered by being plugged into the cigarette lighter of a car, often gives phantom readings in 2003 or 2004 Ford Crown Victorias. The electrical noise from the car's alternator causes the gun to give the false readings.

Rendell and the state police also continue to insist the radar gun works fine when aimed at a moving vehicle. Reports from troopers using the gun, however, dispute those claims.

On Aug. 2, 2003, Cpl. William LaTorre wrote that he pointed the gun at the road, the sky, trees and, finally, a moving car. The gun said all were going 78 mph. He used the gun properly, he said in an e-mail.

"The problem is that if a member doesn't catch the constant reading, he'll think a vehicle...is actually travelling that speed," wrote LaTorre, who was in the Avondale, Chester County barracks at the time. His e-mail went all the way to the head of the Bureau of Patrol.

Last March, Sgt. Thomas Decker of the Philipsburg Barracks, in Centre County, notified his superiors about a similar problem one of his troopers had.

Decker said the trooper told him the gun showed a car going in the 50s then, seconds later, showed the same car going speeds in the 80s.

"He stated that visually the speed of the car did not appear to change," Decker wrote.

The troopers' e-mails were among hundreds of documents subpoenaed by Harrisburg attorney Don Bailey. He represents the state police's radar expert, Tim Shingara, who was stripped of his radar duties last year after testifying in a speeding case about

the wacky radar gun readings.

---

© 2004 Philadelphia Daily News and wire service sources. All Rights Reserved.  
<http://www.philly.com>