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Louisiana Regulators Reviewing Procedures Following Investigators' Deaths

By Stephanie K. Jones | June 9, 2011

Louisiana's chief insurance regulator said his agency is reviewing its policies and procedures for investigating fraud after two insurance department employees **were shot** and killed while conducting an investigation.

Louisiana Department of Insurance investigators Kim Sledge and Rhett Jeansonne were killed on June 7 while attempting to collect case information from an insurance agent in Ville Platte.

Authorities believe that John Melvin Lavergne shot the LDI investigators at about 1 p.m. before turning the gun on himself. The investigators were unarmed.

More than 100 law enforcement officers, including a SWAT team and negotiators, surrounded the two-story brick building for hours before sending in a robot, the *Associated Press* reported. The robot took pictures of John Melvin Lavergne's body and SWAT members soon burst in to find him dead of a self-inflicted wound, state police said.

Louisiana Insurance Commissioner Jim Donelon said Laverne was not being served with cease and desist order at the time of the shooting. He previously had been served and his license was suspended.

"Our investigation yesterday was to request and retrieve files related to two additional cases involving Laverne that arose following the issuance of our cease and desist," Donelon said in a June 8 press conference. "That cease and desist was pending appeal at the division of administrative law."

Donelon said he is requesting that the families of the shooting victims be eligible for the \$250,000 stipend the state makes available for law enforcement officers that fall in the line of duty. In addition to the cash stipend, the statute also provides for scholarships for school age dependents.

Donelon said the department is committed to preventing such an incident from happening again. "First and foremost we want our investigators to be free from harm when conducting investigations," he said.

Lavergne had been in business for almost 40 years, according to the *AP*. He had been served with cease and desist orders, license suspensions and fines in 2009 and again in 2011. Donelon said the 2009 C&D was appealed and the license suspension was eventually lifted by an administrative law judge.

The 2011 C&D was under appeal at the time of the June 7 shooting. Sledge and Jeansonne were investigating additional charges. In the previous investigations, Laverne was charged with providing fraudulent information to the Department of Motor Vehicles and failing to remit policyholder premiums to insurance companies.

Lavergne and other members of his family owned several businesses in Ville Platte, which is located about 70 miles west of Baton Rouge, the *AP* reported.

Associated Press reports contributed to this story.