

Lawyer: Fraternization charge against troopers 'ridiculous'

By MARIE HOWARD
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PORTLAND — Any fraternization charge pinned on undercover agents is "absolutely ridiculous and absurd," William B. Troubh, a Maine State Police Troopers Association lawyer, said Friday.

Troubh and others, including Public Safety Commissioner John W. Atwood and a spokesperson for the Maine Attorney General's Office, would neither confirm or deny that the alleged improprieties involved "excessive fraternization with informants."

Troubh would speak only in general terms regarding fraternization by police officers.

"Obviously they (undercover agents) have to fraternize and socialize. If they don't, they are wasting everyone's time and money. They have to be friendly and be accepted by someone who is selling drugs.

"I don't know what 'excessive fraternization' means. It seems to be just a bunch of words," said Troubh.

The investigation into alleged improprieties by three Maine State Police undercover officers apparently was triggered by statements made by a defendant in a drug trafficking case recently prosecuted in a Maine federal court.

"Generally speaking, it is not unusual for a person convicted of a crime to make statements about an officer's conduct," said Troubh.

"Everytime there is a conviction, there are always allegations. There would not be a trial if the defendant

and the police agreed. It is not unusual for a defendant who has been found guilty to make all sorts of allegations," said the Portland lawyer.

Sgt. Dennis Hayden, Sgt. Michael C. Pratt and Detective John V. Scheid were placed on administrative leave with pay Tuesday pending the outcome of the investigation.

The internal police investigation was ordered after a meeting held Monday, attended by Atwood, Federal Bureau of Investigation agents and Maine State Police Col. Allan A. Weeks.

The leave is not a disciplinary or punitive measure and does not imply guilt.

FBI Special Agent John J. Cloherty Jr., FBI office spokesman, declined to comment on the FBI's role in the investigation. Speaking from his Boston office, Cloherty said what everyone close to the investigation has been saying since Tuesday: "I have no comment."

The three police officers are members of the Tri-County Cocaine Task Force, an undercover organization composed of Maine State Police and officers from police agencies in Penobscot, Hancock and Piscataquis counties.

Hayden, of Vassalboro, is supervisor of the task force, which was formed in June 1986, according to Penobscot County Sheriff Ed Reynolds. Reynolds is a member of the steering committee.

One of the committee's tasks, Reynolds said, is to help maintain fluid relationships between county, state and municipal agencies.