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Big Picture . Local Focus

Month of hidden cameras at Rolling Meadows school

District 15 acknowledges their use to catch employee

By Chad Brooks
cbrooks@dailyherald.com

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Hidden camera surveillance was used for one month this year at Willow Bend School in Rolling Meadows to confirm suspicions of worker misconduct.

That's according to a statement issued Wednesday by Palatine Township Elementary District 15 Superintendent Robert McKanna.

He provided more details about the use of hidden cameras, this year and in the past, to try to clarify the situation that resulted in the firing of a custodian June 6.

The cameras were used May 5 to June 6, McKanna said, to verify that a district worker was engaged in inappropriate conduct.

The District 15 teachers union said the camera was placed in the teachers lounge, where confidential union meetings are held, although the administration has never confirmed that.

But McKanna did say the taping occurred six months after teacher contract negotiations concluded.

"In all cases where this action has been used, the administrative decision was made in response to specific instances of suspected employee misconduct that would have been difficult, or perhaps impossible, to uncover by other means," McKanna wrote.

While officials still wouldn't give details of what the tape revealed that led to the firing, Catharine Schutzius, a division director with the Service Employees International Union Local 73, which represents the custodian, has said it was not criminal in nature.

The custodian is appealing the termination.

McKanna said the district has used hidden cameras two other times in the past five years. While specifics weren't provided, both instances resulted in the firing of workers for misconduct and, he said, union officials were alerted to the camera use.

In all cases, McKanna said the surveillance was video only with no audio.

"This practice is considered legal under both state and federal law as long as it is done in areas where individuals would not be expected to be undressing (such as restrooms, dressing rooms or locker rooms)," McKanna wrote.

But Amy Kunz, a division director with Illinois Education Association UniServe, which filed an

unfair labor practice complaint with the Illinois Educational Labor Relations Board on behalf of the teachers union, said details of how hidden cameras are used must be included in a bargained contract, which did not happen.

McKanna said the district has offered to let the teachers union view the Willow Bend tape, but the union has not responded to that offer.

Lisa Nuss, executive director of the District 15 teachers union, confirmed the union was given the chance to see the tape, but it wants to see any and all recordings that have been made in the past.

"The union would like access to all the tapes," she said.

McKanna said there are no hidden cameras being used right no.

"The District believes that its isolated and infrequent use of video surveillance in uncovering employee misconduct was an appropriate and necessary tool to support the District's efforts to maintain a safe and secure environment for our staff and students," he wrote.

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