



Riverside County District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

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FORMER MANAGER OF PALO VERDE CEMETERY DISTRICT IN BLYTHE ARRESTED AND CHARGED WITH EMBEZZLEMENT

INDIO – The Riverside County District Attorney's Office today, March 11, 2011, charged the former manager of the Palo Verde Cemetery District in Blythe with the embezzlement of more than \$250,000 from the district.

Lathan Duane Williams, DOB: 9-11-63, of Blythe was arrested by members of the DA's Bureau of Investigations on the afternoon of Thursday, March 10, 2011, and booked into the Indio jail.

Williams has been charged with four counts of embezzlement by a public officer, four counts of misuse of public funds and one count of forgery of a DMV title. There are also allegations of taking more than \$200,000. Williams is scheduled to be arraigned **TODAY**, March 11, 2011, at 1:30 p.m. in Dept. 3N at the Larson Justice Center in Indio. If convicted as charged he faces up to eight years, eight months in prison.

The investigation by the DA's Office into Williams' criminal activity began in November 2008 following an audit of the cemetery district by the Riverside County Auditor-Controller's Office.

The cemetery district is a political subdivision of the county governed by a three-member board of trustees appointed by the county board of supervisors. Williams was manager of the cemetery district from 1993 until September 2008.

As part of his job, Williams would receive payments from cemetery district customers for plots and/or burial services. The criminal investigation revealed that, from 2003 through 2008, Williams took about \$189,000 in cash from district customers.

Williams also wrote district checks to himself for fraudulent unused sick time, vacation time, and/or compensatory leave time. The county audit showed that Williams received payouts in 2007 for 21 weeks vacation, seven weeks sick leave, and three weeks comp time. In 2008, he cashed out 10 weeks of vacation, three weeks comp time, and one week of sick leave. The investigation by the DA's Office showed cash-out amounts Williams received over a three-year period to be in excess of \$50,000.

Further investigation revealed that Williams had district invoices for vehicle maintenance of nearly \$12,000, while the board only approved a \$75 per month allocation for vehicle maintenance. Other questionable expenditures by Williams totaling more than \$40,000 were paid for through district checks including credit card purchases and a cell phone used by his wife.

The case, INF1100633, is being prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Debra Postil of the Professional Standards Unit.