Anonymous complaint triggers investigation

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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New Mexico's State Auditor is looking into an anonymous complaint by a group claiming they are city employees concerned about how the city is handling employee and ex-employee health benefits.

That may or may not be a big deal. Auditor Brian Colón's office confirmed that they received a complaint alleging insurance fraud of at least $50,000 and opened an examination, but spokeswoman Stephanie Telles also noted the office opens an examination for every tip received on the anonymous line.

The auditor's office investigates complaints of government fraud, waste and abuse. It doesn't discuss the mechanics of or timeline for their examinations, other than to say they are handled by the investigative division. An examination is not an audit, and not all examinations result in action.

"It's just a review of allegations that have come to our office. It's more limited in scope because it is specific to what the complaint is," Telles said. "When we speak of an audit, we're referring to anything that might include an actual financial audit, which we do every year with every state agency or entity."

The substance of the complaint alleges the city paid for some employees to continue receiving health insurance after they left, and that 14 former employees paid the city to continue their benefits under COBRA but were not enrolled.

City Manager Maryann Ustick and City Attorney Curtis Hayes both said they had not had any complaints from past employees.

"This is an anonymous complaint — so not a credible source. I have received no complaints from any former employees about a lack of health insurance coverage under the COBRA program," Ustick said.

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"If there actually are former employees having issues with their COBRA coverage, I'm not aware of it," Hayes said.

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