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Ex-Riverside police chief charged with driving under the influence of drugs, alcohol

Officials say Russ Leach, 62, crashed his city-owned vehicle Feb. 8 after a night of drinking. The accident happened after he had four drinks at home and at least seven more at a club, the CHP says

Former Riverside Police Chief Russ Leach was charged Monday with driving under the influence of drugs and alcohol when he crashed his city-owned vehicle last month after a night of drinking, officials said.

The Feb. 8 accident happened after Leach had four drinks at home and at least seven more at a strip club in Colton, according to an investigation by the California Highway Patrol.

The CHP said Leach, 62, had been taking "several" prescription medications that carried strict warnings that they not be mixed with alcohol. An employee at Club 215 was worried enough about Leach's condition that she offered to get him a taxi, a request he refused, the report said.

Leach's black Chrysler 300 later ran a red light -- which was caught on tape -- at Van Buren and Arlington Avenue in Riverside and struck what the CHP called a "low-profile object" that flattened his tires and damaged the front end of the car. He drove on the rims until coming to a stop a few miles later, about 2:50 a.m.

"His intoxication level was such that he did not realize the extent of the damage and continued driving for an extended time until he was pulled over by police officers," the probe said.

The officers reported that Leach was confused and had been drinking, but he was not given a field sobriety test. Instead, he was driven home.

The Riverside Police Department is now the focus of an internal investigation, led by City Manager Bradley Hudson and former Riverside County Dist. Atty. Grover Trask, to see if Leach received special treatment because of his position.

Leach admitted being disoriented and taking medication but never said if he was drinking. He resigned a few days after the accident. He could not be reached for comment Monday.

Hudson issued a statement saying his investigation into the incident is nearly complete and will provide "specific information" regarding how the officers reacted to the accident.

"Information available at the scene clearly indicated that Leach was driving while impaired and the matter was handled outside established Riverside Police Department protocols for motor vehicle accidents involving drivers who are impaired . . . by alcohol and/or drugs," he said.

"Primary among my concerns in this matter is that the former chief was provided treatment beyond what other motorists would be afforded in similar circumstances. I expect all city employees to use common sense and to provide equitable treatment to all."

CHP spokesman Lt. David Lane said his agency's report focused solely on the accident and not how the police officers handled it.

"He is being charged with DUI, the same thing he would have been charged with had one of our officers pulled him over that night," Lane said. "Anyone driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs is unsafe."

The Riverside County district attorney's office filed the misdemeanor charges Monday. Leach is scheduled to be arraigned at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday.