

## **Company officials accused of stealing \$1.5 million**

SANTA ANA – A chief financial officer and accountant are expected to appear in court Friday to be arraigned on charges that they stole more than \$1.5 million from their employer by processing over 800 fraudulent checks to themselves, prosecutors said.

Eric Wayne Helgemo, 50, of Vista, is charged with 38 felony counts of computer access and fraud. Co-defendant Maria Lorena Vega Yarrish, 40, of Buena Park, is facing 40 felony counts of computer access and fraud. Both defendants face sentencing enhancements and allegations for property damage over \$1.3 million, causing loss over \$100,000 and aggravated white collar crime over \$100,000, according to the Orange County District Attorney's Office.

If convicted, Helgemo faces a maximum sentence of 35 years in state prison and Yarrish faces a maximum sentence of 37 years in state prison and, prosecutors said.

Yarrish was hired in 2000 as a human resources representative for Pacific Polymers, Inc., a chemical sealant company in Garden Grove. In 2002, Helgemo was hired by the same company as vice president and chief financial officer and one of his responsibilities included supervising Yarrish.

Yarrish processed employee timesheets using a computer payroll and paycheck system. Helgemo, who prepared financial reports for the company owner, reviewed the weekly payroll and paycheck reports prepared by Yarrish, prosecutors said.

Between 2003 and 2008, Yarrish and Helgemo are accused of stealing over \$1.5 million from Pacific Polymers by processing between one and 11 fraudulent paychecks per pay period for themselves. Helgemo is accused of taking 593 fraudulent payments amounting to over \$1.1 million. Yarrish is accused of taking 229 fraudulent payments amounting to over \$340,000, prosecutors said.

In June 2008, Pacific Polymers was sold to Illinois Tool Works, Inc. and the defendants' jobs were eliminated. The theft was discovered after the purchase by ITW during an audit of Pacific Polymer's finances.

The defendants were arrested Wednesday by Garden Grove police. They are being held at the Orange County Jail in lieu of \$1.5 million bail. In order to post bail, they must prove that the money is from a legal and legitimate source.