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City manager starts private probe into leak

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Desert Hot Springs

Council members say questions over earnings distracting focus from 'crime'

By Nelsy Rodriguez

The Desert Sun

Desert Hot Springs City Manager Jerry Hanson on Friday hired a private company to investigate a City Hall leak of his financial records to the press.

Hanson said he opted to pass the investigation on to a private company - whose name he would not release - rather than have the city's police department, the county sheriff's department or the District Attorney look in to it.

"I don't trust (the departments)," he said Friday in a meeting with Desert Sun editorial reporters, editors and Desert Hot Springs councilmembers Mary Stephens and Hank Hohenstein.

City councilmembers said Friday they support the city manager and they agree with his decision.

"It is illegal what just took place in my city," said Vice Mayor Stephens, an accountant. "Someone committed theft."

Early this week, Hanson learned his W2 income tax form had been taken from the Human Resources/Personnel trailer when a television news reporter flashed it in his face, asking him to explain his wages earned in 2004.

Along with the W2, which contains personal information like his Social Security number, Hanson said other personnel files are also missing. He said he does not know if those files were taken at the same time or by the same persons.

"That's part of the investigation," he said.

Hanson said previously he believes the leak may have come from "misplaced and uninformed, blind loyalty," involving "personnel changes over the last week."

Last week, Hanson fired Police Chief Roy Hill, much to the disappointment of the police department.

Hill had received a 100 percent vote of confidence from his officers and the Police Officers Association issued a statement denouncing his termination and urging the council reinstate him.

Sgt. Eddie Cole, president of the Police Officers Association, declined to comment.

The Desert Sun does not have a copy of the W2 form, but Hanson issued a release about its contents.

The W2 form showed Hanson earned about two-and-a-half times more than his base salary. Hanson justified earning \$322,809 rather than his salary of approximately \$132,000 by saying he cashed in 700 hours of accumulated leave time and