

# Managers investigated for missing money

## Whistle-blower sparks investigation

Updated: Thursday, 19 Aug 2010, 12:16 AM MDT  
Published : Thursday, 19 Aug 2010, 12:16 AM MDT

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SOCORRO (KRQE) - After a whistle-blower brought attention to a big chunk of money missing from the Socorro Electric Cooperative's financial records two managers were told to stay home.

The whistle was blown when a letter sent to the board of trustees surfaced claiming two managers took money. The letter identified one of them by her first name "Kathy."

Earlier this week two managers at the co-op were put on leave. While Board President Paul Bustamante would not confirm their names, sources told KRQE News 13 the two under investigation are General Manager Polo Pineda jr. and officer manager/accountant Kathy Torres.

After conducting an internal investigation Bustamante said the board discovered that money had been missing.

"I believe there was a figure of \$35,000," Bustamante said.

According to Bustamante the two employees under investigation claim they "borrowed" the money and thought it had been paid back with their 401-k plans.

Bustamante said employees are allowed to borrow money, as a type of advance, but it must be paid back within a month. The money that was being investigated was borrowed after last year's audit.

"Last May or so," Bustamante said. "It's been probably a year ago."

Bustamante said it is up to the managers to make sure workers pay the money back. However, in the recent case sources told News 13 that it was the managers, Pineda and Torres, who didn't pay up until a year later.

Bustamante said the money was finally paid back a few months ago.

"It looks like it's been paid back," Bustamante said. "We just need to look for receipts."

Some in the community said they found it suspicious that the money wasn't collected until after members questioned the lack of transparency in the co-op's financial records in April.

Bustamante said that the board's biggest concern is that the community doesn't lose trust in the co-op. Something he worries they already have.

"That trust that's gotta be there," Bustamante said.

Bustamante said the investigation is not over and that more people may be involved. He also said the co-op could change the way it runs its lending system.

The board president said the whistle-blower letter surfaced after the missing money was repaid.