

DOJ helicopter used at El Dorado County football game

By Mike Luery, KCRA-TV

California taxpayers shelled out hundreds of dollars for the apparent unauthorized use of a police helicopter at a high school football game.

The helicopter incident involved a high school homecoming event that top law enforcement supervisors at the Department of Justice knew nothing about, KCRA 3 has learned.

The incident took place last November, when a DOJ helicopter hovered over El Dorado Hills for a homecoming game at Oak Ridge High School.

In a video later uploaded to YouTube, viewers can see an agent perched precariously on the side of the chopper.

As the door opens, the DOJ agent then dropped the ball to a football player waiting on the field.

Why were DOJ agents flying over a football field?

KCRA 3 has learned the agent was dropping the football to his son, a player on the Oak Ridge team.

The agent, the pilot and the Department of Justice helicopter are all state resources, yet DOJ supervisors had no idea the football drop was taking place, KCRA 3 has learned.

“I don’t think anybody looking at that will see a legitimate public purpose in the use of that helicopter,” said Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. “I think there needs to be a thorough investigation into who authorized this, how much it cost, what was the reason behind this and basically, what were they thinking.”

KCRA 3 showed the video of the helicopter incident to Larry Wallace, director of law enforcement for the Department of Justice.

"I can confirm that is a DOJ chopper, yes," Wallace told KCRA 3.

Wallace said the launching of the helicopter cost taxpayers between \$900 and \$1,300 – not including personnel costs.

The helicopter is normally used for drug busts, Wallace told KCRA 3.

"It certainly doesn't strike us that they were using that chopper to pull up marijuana plants out of the middle of the football field," Coupal said.

KCRA 3 asked Wallace for his reaction, upon seeing the video.

"It appeared to be a misuse of state property," Wallace told KCRA 3.

Wallace would not provide details of whether anyone from the DOJ approved the ball drop, or who was involved.

However, he did say the DOJ had put new protocols into place because of the incident.

"I'm going to personally approve any authorized use of that helicopter as we move forward, and that's been put into place," Wallace said.

The Department of Justice won't reveal any details about disciplinary action, but KCRA 3 has learned independently that the special agent involved was put on leave for a substantial period of time.