

Poland admits guilt; could get 20 years



Johnny Poland will never be a police officer again after pleading guilty May 22 to a federal crime. Photo/LTN file

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe police Officer Johnny Poland is going to prison.

Poland pleaded guilty today to obstruction of an official proceeding. This was one of four charges leveled against the 44-year-old earlier this year.

He will be sentenced Aug. 7.

He faces a maximum sentence of 20 years behind bars, a \$250,000 fine and three years of supervised released.

According to court documents, on June 29, 2011, Poland interfered with the FBI's investigation of a South Lake Tahoe gang member. He persuaded the gang member's girlfriend to conceal and destroy evidence. In October and November of that year, Poland tampered with this witness in an investigation into his own conduct as well as the conduct of the gang

member. Poland instructed another witness to conceal and destroy evidence rather than provide it to federal authorities. Poland admitted that he corruptly attempted to alter, destroy, mutilate, and conceal evidence material to an official proceeding.

Poland admitted guilt to all of this on May 22 in federal court in Sacramento.

The original federal complaint against Poland had details dating to 2003.

Poland, who was hired by the department in 1998, began having substantial public run-ins with his superiors beginning in November 2006. He was one of the officers called to South Tahoe High School regarding gang violence that led to the campus being on lockdown for several hours. The previous three years Poland had been the resource officer at the school.

He was fired in June 2007 after admitting to letting a student involved in the tussle to keep a BB gun in a vehicle despite a no weapons ban at the school.

He fought that termination and was reinstated in fall 2009.

In November 2011, when the federal investigation began, he was put on paid administrative leave.

Local FBI Agent Chris Champion, who was instrumental in the investigation, could not be reached for comment.

When the indictment came out earlier this year, the city was able to take him off the payroll. But even today, despite the guilty plea, the police department cannot automatically fire him.

“There is still a process that protects him under the Police Officer Bill of Rights,” Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*. “We hope that he understands that resigning would free up a spot.”

Poland remains out on bail until sentencing. He was released after his arrest in January on \$100,000 bond.