

DRUG SMUGGLING PROBED

State prison officials are investigating an alleged scheme by one or more inmates suspected of having illegal drugs smuggled to them in packages bearing the names and return addresses of [defense attorneys](#).

Pam Laborde, communications director for the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections, said the probe began at Avoyelles Correctional Center near Cottonport.

“I can confirm that there is an ongoing investigation of drugs coming into the prison through ‘legal mail,’ ” Laborde said.

“Once the investigation is complete, a written report will be submitted to authorities for possible criminal charges,” she added.

“Due to the ongoing status of the investigation, the department will refrain from giving more details at this time,” Laborde said.

[Defense attorneys](#) throughout the state have been e-mailing each other, warning about the alleged prison mail scam, for more than three weeks, Michael S. Walsh said.

Walsh is a past president of the Louisiana Association of Criminal Defense Attorneys and chairman of the Louisiana Attorney Disciplinary Board. An alert was sent to the approximately 400 members of the association, he said.

“It went out shortly after lawyers were made aware of this problem,” he said.

Drug smuggling probed

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Officials suspect legal mail used to send drugs to inmates

By BILL LODGE
Advocate staff writer
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Walsh, whose office is in **Baton Rouge**, said unauthorized use of attorney names and addresses cannot be permitted for mail sent to prisons.

Otherwise, Walsh said, there would be an increased risk that privileged legal communications between attorneys and inmate clients eventually could be violated.

“We also don’t want illegal drugs sent into our prisons,” Walsh said.

The unauthorized use of lawyers’ names and addresses to smuggle drugs into prison facilities in Louisiana is not a new phenomenon, [Baton Rouge lawyer](#) Joseph Scott said Monday.

Scott is an assistant parish attorney who drafts ordinances for the Metro Council.

When Scott is not drafting city-parish ordinances, he represents indigent criminal defendants in federal courts.

Nearly six years ago, however, Scott said, he was forced to take fast action to thwart a client’s efforts to disguise a drug package as legal communications from the attorney.

In early 2005, Scott said, he received a package addressed to that client at the West Baton Rouge Detention Center, where the man had been sent to await federal sentencing on a conviction for distribution of crack cocaine.

That inmate did not receive the package because he had been transferred to another facility, Scott said.

The return address on the package was that of Scott’s law office.

“It was my letterhead,” Scott said, but he didn’t recall sending that package to his client at the detention center.

When he opened the package, Scott said, “I immediately thought: ‘Oh, my God. It’s porn and dope.’ ”

Scott said he called the U.S. Marshals Service and was instructed to bring the package to deputies.

“I was lucky,” Scott recalled. “The U.S. Postal Service videotapes every transaction.”

Within a week, Scott said, federal investigators discovered video at a post office in Plaquemine, where a woman had mailed the package to the inmate.

Tyrus Miguel Cooper, now 32, had been Scott’s client. Cooper admitted to a federal judge that he gave the woman an envelope bearing Scott’s letterhead and asked her to send him pornographic magazines and marijuana, court records show.

Kentika Malayna Julee Rogers, now 33, admitted to a federal judge that she mailed the package as Cooper requested, court records show.

Rogers was placed on probation for three years.

Cooper is serving a 25-year sentence on a federal conviction on distribution of crack cocaine. For using the Postal Service in an effort to smuggle marijuana into the detention center, he was sentenced to four years in prison.

“I still love criminal defense work,” Scott said. “But I won the ‘who’s got the worst client’ award that year.”

By Bill Lodge

Advocate staff writer

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