

Demotion refused; chief of animal control fired

Ousted director says officials bullied her

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Dr. Dena Mangiamele, the embattled head of the county Animal Control Department, was fired yesterday after she refused to accept a demotion.

The decision was reached yesterday by Alex Martinez, county deputy chief administrative officer, who said he offered Mangiamele an "executive-level" position below director last week.

"Regrettably, it appears that Dr. Mangiamele is unwilling to accept an executive-level position," Martinez said in a memo to animal control staff that was obtained by *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

Mangiamele, who had said she was proud of improvements she had made in the department, said in a prepared statement yesterday that she was bullied by her bosses at the county and is considering legal action.

"It is unfortunate that the county allows persons at the highest level of management to bully, intimidate and coerce its employees," she said. "This 'management style' has no place in government."

Mangiamele was removed as director July 13 by county officials who told her the action was being taken to shore up the agency's sagging community relations and accelerate improvements in the department.

The plan was to have Mangiamele work with interim department head Mikel Haas -- who was temporarily shifted from his job as the county's registrar of voters -- to develop a community relations strategy and polish her management skills.

"Unfortunately, I have received neither the commitment to the reassignment nor the input I was seeking that would allow us to move

forward with this plan," Martinez wrote in the memo.

Mangiamele's firing came nearly three weeks after a *Union-Tribune* report disclosed numerous instances of neglect and mismanagement in the department and after months of mounting tension between Mangiamele and county veterinarians and animal welfare groups.

Martinez's memo said the newspaper's coverage "confirmed our greatest concern: that our community relations problem is not only unresolved, but beginning to impact the public's confidence in the department."

County officials declined to be interviewed on the matter.

In February, the county brought in the Humane Society of the United States to inspect the department after getting pressure from community groups. The society's preliminary report cited hostilities between the department and local veterinarians and animal welfare groups, and suggested the department had lost the community's faith.

Mangiamele's firing was hailed by these groups as a first step toward improving the strained relationship they have had with the department since she took over two years ago.

"She may have had some good ideas, but her attitude was unacceptable," said Peggy Howell, a founder of Friends of County Animal Shelters, the county's largest animal rescue organization. "We certainly look forward to working with Mr. Haas, and doing what we can to get the department rolling."

Pauline White, the administrator of the county Veterinary Association, said she hopes the move will mean improved conditions for animals in the county shelters.

"It is very much a positive move and will invite more citizens in the community to contribute to the welfare of the county's animals," White said.