

SEPTA still mum on shake-up

Broken escalators have inconvenienced many customers



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SEPTA yesterday continued to tout its new reconstructed look and to shield most of the disciplinary action taken in the wake of an expensive and embarrassing scandal in its legal department.

The transit agency's top attorney, G. Roger Bowers, was forced to resign May 30, six months after SEPTA was found in contempt of court in a lawsuit filed by the mother of a 4-year-old boy whose foot was severed by a Broad Street subway escalator.

Bowers received six months pay in his deal to bow out, plus any accumulated vacation time, SEPTA General Manager Jack Leary said yesterday after a press conference to discuss changes in the transit agency.

With a \$143,000 annual salary, that makes Bowers severance package at least \$71,500. SEPTA has been unable to come up with the exact price of that deal.

A jury in December awarded Deneen Hall and her son, Shareif, \$51 million for the Nov. 27 1996 accident. SEPTA threatened to appeal but settled with the Hall family for \$7.4 million.

The judge in the case fined SEPTA \$1 million, ruling the agency had hid key documents showing it knew its escalators were a danger to riders. That fine was later reduced to \$100,000.

"There is no justification," Leary said yesterday. "We did not do a good job."

SEPTA hired a "blue-ribbon" panel of outside attorneys to investigate its legal department.

The panel's 60 recommendations, released in an April 27 report, will be implemented by the end of the year, Leary said.

"People will know what's expected of them," Leary said of the restructuring, which had been in consideration before the Hall case came to light.

Leary, who announced the changes in his agency on May 26, has refused to discuss discipline.

"It's important that we just stay away from that issue," he said.

A SEPTA May 25 internal report by Leary, obtained by the Daily News, says 15 employees were either fired, suspended, or reprimanded.

SEPTA has not responded to a Daily News request for information about the status of several of those employees who were involved in the case from the day of the accident until the end of the lawsuit.

Two SEPTA employees, Stephen Krenzel and Daniel Duffy, have confirmed they were fired.

Krenzel, who was assistant director for construction and maintenance on the Broad Street subway, investigated the accident.

Duffy was the subway's maintenance manager.

Both men plan to appeal their firings in a SEPTA hearing.

Krenzel was called to SEPTA 's headquarters on May 30 and told his 20-year career with the agency was over because the judge questioned his investigation.

"I had a feeling I was going to be discharged," he said. "The lower people are the ones taking the brunt of this."

Leary denied that yesterday, noting Krenzel and Duffy were both SEPTA managers.

SEPTA Chairman Pasquale "Pat" Deon, who joined Leary in yesterday's press conference, called the Hall case "a very painful time" for the transit agency.

Asked how SEPTA could regain credibility with the riders and taxpayers who support the agency, Deon said, "I think the credibility was never lost."