

US Investigators Subpoena Ex-FDA Chief's Records

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By Lisa Richwine

WASHINGTON (Reuters) Dec 19 - The Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Inspector General has sent subpoenas to three financial institutions as part of an investigation of former Food and Drug Administration Commissioner Lester Crawford, a source familiar with the probe said on Monday.

The inspector general's office is investigating Crawford's abrupt departure from the FDA in September.

"Subpoenas were issued to three financial institutions in the investigation of Lester Crawford," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity and without identifying the recipients of the subpoenas.

Judy Holtz, a spokeswoman for the inspector general, confirmed the subpoenas had been sent but declined to comment further.

An attorney for Crawford, Barbara Van Gelder, had no comment. "We won't comment on any ongoing investigations," she said.

Crawford resigned as FDA commissioner just two months after surviving a tough Senate confirmation fight. He gave no explanation, other than saying it was time to step aside at age 67.

Lawmakers requested an inspector general probe of Crawford's sudden exit and whether it was related to his financial holdings and disclosures.

Crawford served as the FDA's deputy commissioner and acting commissioner for more than three years prior to his July 2005 confirmation as permanent FDA chief.

Financial disclosure forms filed in June 2005 show that as late as 2004, Crawford or his wife owned stock in companies with products regulated by the FDA.

The companies included hamburger chain Wendy's International Inc.; food distributor Sysco Corp. ; food and beverage maker PepsiCo ; Kimberly-Clark Corp., which makes medical devices, and Embrex Inc., an agriculture biotechnology company.

Shares in those companies were sold at various times during 2004, according to the forms.

Crawford endured several controversies during his tenure, including a series of drug-safety concerns and repeated delays on Barr Pharmaceuticals Inc.'s bid to sell the Plan B "morning-after" contraceptive without a prescription.

He also faced anonymous charges of an extramarital affair with a female subordinate. An earlier inspector general investigation found no basis for the allegations.