

FBI criticized for testimony and lab errors

Inspector general suggests 5 agents be disciplined

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — FBI crime lab agents produced flawed scientific work or inaccurate testimony in major cases such as the Oklahoma City bombing, the Justice Department's inspector general said yesterday. He recommended discipline for five agents and transfer of the original whistleblower.

But Inspector General Michael Bromwich concluded in his report that agents at the crime lab did not commit perjury or fabricate evidence.

Attorney General Janet Reno said the damaging findings already have been raised by defense attorneys in 13 court cases and "there has been no change in the outcome of the cases." Hundreds of prosecutions that used lab evidence remain under review.

Despite "significant instances of testimonial errors, substandard analytical work and deficient practices," the lab is still "capable of performing its mission," Reno said.

Bromwich also criticized lab management and the qualifications of agents in its explosives unit, where he recommended that only scientists be employed. He endorsed the FBI's current effort to get the lab accredited by outside experts.

In a typical criticism of work on high-profile cases, Bromwich blasted lab supervisor David Williams' 1993 testimony that a urea nitrate bomb damaged New York's World Trade Center. FBI chemists found no explosive residues at the site.

Williams' testimony was "inaccu-



Inspector General Michael Bromwich concluded, however, that agents did not commit perjury or fabricate any evidence.

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rate and incomplete" and appeared to be "tailored to the most incriminating result," Bromwich said.

The FBI accepted nearly all of Bromwich's recommendations. To avoid any conflict, the Justice Department, not the FBI, will rule on Bromwich's proposals to punish agents and transfer the chief whistleblower, scientist-agent Frederic Whitehurst.

"The improvements . . . must and are being made," FBI Deputy Director Bill Esposito said.

FBI Director Louis Freeh is looking for an expert outside the FBI to head the lab and the bureau will hire more scientists, Esposito added.

Bromwich said Whitehurst, who triggered the investigation, should be transferred because his "overstated and incendiary" allegations have poisoned his relations with other lab workers.

In the Oklahoma bombing, Bromwich said explosives unit supervisor Williams decided a 4,000-pound ammonium nitrate-fuel oil bomb was used based on the defendants' alleged purchases rather than on scientific evidence.