



### Another state agency battling payroll inconsistencies



PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

### Vehicles for the Massachusetts Environmental Police parked at the office on Milk Street in Westborough.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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The Massachusetts State Police isn't the only state law enforcement agency mired in a payroll morass. Members of the Massachusetts Environmental Police regularly take overtime assignments and off-duty details in the middle of the workday, scheduling their normal state work around more profitable side gigs, according to payroll records.

Agency officials and Governor Charlie Baker vowed to crack down on the practice following media reports two years ago, but the routine continues today.

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Despite earlier warnings, environmental officers also continue to stay on the clock while traveling between regular and extra shifts, records show. They also use paid time off to stretch their schedules and ensure overtime payouts, according to timesheet data.

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“It’s a situation that’s ripe for corruption,” said Thomas Nolan, a criminology researcher and former Boston police lieutenant.

The ongoing situation at the Environment Police has not risen to the same level as the [alleged criminal overtime fraud at the State Police](#), which erupted into a major scandal this year. Two troopers have pleaded guilty to federal embezzlement charges, four others are being prosecuted, and dozens more are under investigation.

The low-profile Environmental Police, which employs 83 officers on a \$11 million annual budget, enforces fishing, hunting, boating, and recreational vehicle laws. It is led by Colonel James McGinn, a former State Police sergeant who

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Name	Title	Total pay	Base pay	Overtime pay	Detail, other pay	Buyout pay
Eric Baldwin	Sergeant	\$181,338.77	\$86,708.75	\$26,645.52	\$67,984.50	\$-
Charles Ziemba	Lieutenant	\$164,384.50	\$84,328.86	\$36,300.13	\$13,333.38	\$31,221.83
Wilson Gray	Lieutenant	\$143,316.38	\$102,391.68	\$27,661.18	\$13,263.52	\$-
Anthony Wolski	Lieutenant	\$142,130.65	\$82,067.87	\$20,128.07	\$7,699.17	\$32,235.54
Scott Amati	Lieutenant	\$139,257.70	\$102,385.39	\$28,437.60	\$7,434.71	\$-
Robert Akin	Lieutenant	\$138,351.76	\$100,814.11	\$23,967.03	\$13,570.62	\$-
James Cullen	Lieutenant	\$134,452.33	\$102,321.72	\$23,193.33	\$7,937.28	\$-
James McGinn	Colonel/ Director	\$132,215.30	\$132,215.30	\$-	\$-	\$-
Rob Roy	Sergeant	\$131,973.05	\$94,332.47	\$27,808.53	\$9,832.05	\$-
Matthew Bass	Lieutenant	\$126,972.80	\$101,535.41	\$18,898.42	\$6,518.97	\$-

### Table: What Mass. Environmental Police officers made last year

The highest-paid officer made \$181,300, including \$26,645 in overtime and nearly \$68,000 from details and other pay.

[Read: Mass. launches office to oversee scandal-plagued State Police](#)

served as Baker's personal campaign driver before Baker appointed him to the agency's helm in 2014. Officials from the state's executive environmental office told the Globe scheduling flexibility allows officers to do critical work. Spokeswoman Katie Gronendyke said the work officers do on split shifts is "a crucial component of the Environmental Police's mission to protect the health, safety, and rights of the public while preserving the environment for future generations."

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Officials also insisted that officers can work while traveling between assignments and that the agency is largely powerless to tell officers how they can use time-off benefits.

Baker's office declined to comment.

The average base pay of environmental officers is about \$80,000, though about half the force earned six-figure payouts last year with overtime and private details. The highest-paid officer [made \\$181,300](#), including \$26,645 in overtime and nearly \$68,000 from details and other pay, records show.

McGinn, who retired from State Police in 2005, earns an annual salary of \$132,200. He declined an interview request.

In the fall of 2016, a [series](#) of media [reports](#) exposed the agency's "split-shift" policy, allowing officers to interrupt regular shifts, work some hours of higher-paying overtime or detail work, then finish their regular shift.

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WCVB-TV also found some officers spent work hours at home or sitting in their trucks during security details. A WBZ-TV report detailed how timesheets showed no gaps in time for officers to travel between shifts. On some days, officers cut normal shifts short while using enough vacation, sick, or personal time to be eligible for hours of overtime pay.

The revelations prompted the executive environmental office to [launch](#) a wide-ranging review in late 2016. Baker vowed the state would address any problems it discovered.

The review led to discipline for one officer who split shifts inappropriately and another who worked from home without permission, officials said, while declining to give details.

Also, McGinn [announced](#) a policy [change](#) intended to curb split shifts and promised to personally review all such requests.

Today, the agency acknowledges officers continue to split shifts for several types of assignments, including private details — a type the agency explicitly promised to ban.

While the union contract allows for officers to split their shifts, it stipulates that decision is ultimately up to the agency's colonel. Officials from the environmental officers' union did not respond to requests for comment.

Timesheet data from early 2018 show officers rarely took any time off between on- and off-duty shifts and didn't account for the time it takes to get to and from the different locations.

The details allowed by the agency pay officers \$66-per-hour to escort tankers carrying liquefied natural gas to Boston Harbor. The agency collects a 10 percent fee on each detail.

Timesheet data show officers regularly split shifts for overtime opportunities. Some overtime is funded by a recurring federal grant that pays the agency [nearly \\$1 million annually](#) to enforce laws to protect fish and marine wildlife. Officers also earn state-funded overtime to teach hunting law classes.

The number of overtime split shifts averaged about 100 each month during the 15 months from when the split-shift policy changed through this past March, a Globe analysis found. The agency said it doesn't track how often officers split shifts.

Neither State Police nor Boston Police allows officers to split shifts, spokesmen said.

Nolan, the criminology researcher, said he doesn't know of any law enforcement agency that does.

"It's poor management practice," he said. "It leads to potential abuse on time and attendance record keeping. And it leads to a potential for double-dipping."

He said it could lead to a host of problems: Officers may be distracted, tired, and less effective during their normal shifts. It could leave the agency short-staffed for emergencies. And, Nolan said, it raises major accountability concerns.

"It's a head-scratcher," he said. "You're letting the people at the lowest levels essentially run the agency."

In at least six instances in a one-month period, officers used paid time off to trigger overtime payouts. For example, records show a lieutenant punched in for 6.5 regular hours, then used 2 personal hours. He then clocked in for extra — overtime — work one second after ending his first shift.

The agency said existing rules allow officers to use paid time off largely at their own discretion.

Environmental Police paid out about \$715,000 in overtime and \$800,000 in detail pay last year, records show.

News of the continued issues comes amid state and federal [probes into State Police payroll practices](#), investigations that allege public servants rigged shifts for personal financial gain.

Baker has pledged changes within the agency, including recently activating GPS tracking technology in cruisers to strengthen accountability.

In contrast, Environmental Police removed GPS tracking devices from its patrol vehicles three years ago at the union's request. The agency said tracking capabilities have not been restored.

The Environmental Police has weathered a handful of other controversies in recent years, as has the agency overseeing it, the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs.

McGinn's 2015 overhaul of his management team appeared to violate internal policies, including the hiring of an old law school classmate, Brian Perrin, as his deputy, the Lowell Sun [reported](#).

The Globe [reported](#) last summer the executive environmental office's leader Secretary Matthew Beaton used taxpayer funds to pay for a plane ticket during a Florida vacation and was shuttled between the State House and Boston's airport in an unmarked, fully equipped Environmental Police vehicle, with Perrin as his chauffeur.

Beaton, who had [faced questions](#) about whether he was qualified for his job when Baker picked him in 2014, quietly paid back the money only after it was found by an internal audit.

In spring 2017, the Globe [detailed](#) how state environmental agencies were rife with employees who have political and family ties, despite Baker's campaign vow to ban patronage hires. That [spurred](#) the state's Democratic Party to call for an investigation and at least one employee [abruptly left](#).

This followed a [series of embarrassing revelations](#) in fall 2016 over environmental agencies' staff misusing state resources, along with allegations of political intimidation, prompting Baker to order suspensions and firings.

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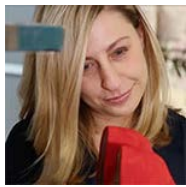
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