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2 ex-Orange County Fire Authority employees say they were wrongly dismissed following criticism of the agency

Former employees also say they raised concerns about a change in emergency dispatcher scheduling.

A water dropping helicopter dumps water on a home on Via El Estribo in Anaheim Hills during the Canyon Two Fire in Anaheim, California, on Monday, October 9, 2017. (Photo by Jeff Gritchen, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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Two former Orange County Fire Authority employees have filed a lawsuit against the department alleging they were wrongfully dismissed following one's criticism of the Canyon 2 fire response and the questions both raised regarding a change in emergency-dispatcher scheduling.

Megan Soman, who joined the department as a reserve firefighter in 1997 and

In interviews, both said they filed the lawsuit to make sure what they say happened to them doesn't happen to anyone else.

OCFA officials declined to comment on the allegations, citing a policy to not discuss pending litigation. The suit seeks unspecified financial damages, civil penalties and reinstatement.

The Canyon 2 fire burned for eight days in October 2017, charring 9,200 acres, destroying 15 homes and displacing thousands of residents of nearby Anaheim Hills and North Tustin.

[Reports previously released by the county and the OCFA have sharply criticized the department's early response to the Canyon 2 fire](#), with one report finding it rife with "human error and potential complacency." The department dismissed the first sightings of flames as wind-blown ashes, and were slow in deploying firefighting equipment to the area, the reports found.

Soman, during internal interviews following the Canyon 2 fire, was critical of another supervisor's decision to not call in more resources on a day when the fire danger was particularly acute. Also, she questioned the competency of the manager of an emergency-communications supervisor she and another employee were called in to replace the day of the wild fire, according to the lawsuit.

"There was a lack of training, and I don't want this to happen again, and it shouldn't have happened," Soman said of her decision to voice criticism of her colleagues during the investigation. "I never thought that my constructive criticism would negatively impact me."

Soman, who was a union representative at the time, said she also angered department higher-ups by criticizing during public meetings their move from 24- to 12-hour shifts for OCFA dispatchers, which she argued would "make it more difficult for the workers and hurt public safety."

"At a certain point, I got messages and phone calls from people in the department telling me to shut my mouth," Soman said. "And I didn't."

Fader, a probationary employee at the time, also spoke out against the shift changes. According to the lawsuit, he was then subjected to harassment by several other fire communication supervisors and ultimately fired.

Soman, Fader's immediate supervisor, was not told of his dismissal until after he was fired, according to the lawsuit. She acknowledged that out of frustration she slammed a door and used an expletive in a private meeting with her supervisor, which the lawsuit alleges led to her being placed on leave and ultimately fired for "misconduct."

"I think I was held to some ridiculous standard," Soman said. "And it is so infuriating, because there are people who have done so much worse."

Soman said she was shocked at her dismissal, because she had never been disciplined during a 20-year career at the agency. The lawsuit describes her as at times being "the face" of the OCFA: An image of her was prominently depicted on the agency's website.

"I literally grew up there," Soman said. "There isn't anything I haven't done short of flying the helicopter. How does somebody who was your all-star, hall-of-famer, fall by your own hand? I was led to a slaughter, and I want to know why."

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