

MINNEAPOLIS

U.S. Bank Stadium security firm is fired after investigation

Monterrey Security had been under investigation for months.

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U.S. Bank Stadium operator SMG abruptly terminated its contract with security provider Monterrey Security one year into a three-year contract for sloppy recordkeeping, as well as inadequate training and background checks, officials announced Tuesday.

Chicago-based Monterrey was fired after an [investigation by a Minneapolis law firm](file:///C:/Users/lundekm/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BWUOZLLQ/REDACTED%20-%202017.09.25%20--%20Final%20Report%20on%20Monterrey%20Security%20Consultants%20...pdf) (<file:///C:/Users/lundekm/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/BWUOZLLQ/REDACTED%20-%202017.09.25%20--%20Final%20Report%20on%20Monterrey%20Security%20Consultants%20...pdf>)

found the firm failed to comply with state licensing requirements for its employees. Within hours of that announcement, a state regulatory board that had conducted a separate investigation voted 4-0 against renewing the firm's license to provide protective services in Minnesota.

Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority (MSFA) Chairman Mike Vekich said Monterrey was notified of the action late Monday. By Tuesday morning, new security was in place at the 14-month-old, \$1.1 billion stadium.

"Even though Monterrey failed to comply with regulations and established policies, that did not lead to any operational security issues," Vekich said in an interview.

SMG, the global firm that runs and books the building, held the contract, which was given to Monterrey in early 2016. The decision to hire the firm was made by SMG, former MSFA leaders and the Minnesota Vikings, the building's main tenant.

The three-year stadium contract was the only one Monterrey had in Minnesota and now it won't have any more any time soon. The Minnesota Private Detective and Protective Services Agency Board decided not to renew the firm's license after a scathing report of its own and almost two hours of cross-examination style questioning of firm founder Juan Gaytan.

In moving to deny the license renewal, board Chairman Richard Hodsdon said Monterrey had "hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of individuals performing security functions" who weren't properly trained or licensed to perform the jobs under Minnesota law.



(http://stmedia.startribune.com/images/ows_150644530582678.jpg)
AARON LAVINSKY, STAR TRIBUNE

Fans make their way into U.S. Bank Stadium before the start of an exhibition soccer match in this file photo.



That was one of many points of contention between the board and Gaytan, who cried twice during the meeting when discussing his firm. Gaytan repeatedly said that staff members who worked at metal detectors and searched bags weren't providing security functions nor were staff members who were on the field for Vikings games.

Hodsdon said under state law those staff members were clearly performing security functions. The report to the board also found that a St. Cloud swimming team as well as a sports team from Iowa worked at the stadium as fundraisers and "nonprofit" partners of Monterrey without background checks.

The report even included a photograph of a felon wearing a Monterrey uniform standing on the field, checking security credentials, during the Vikings game against the New York Giants game last year. That man, Ricky Pouncil, was sentenced to 13 months in an extortion case involving a man who was having an extramarital affair and killed himself.

Although the board never publicly or privately confirmed that it was investigating Monterrey's practices, SMG acted on media reports and hired the Minneapolis-based Maslon law firm to conduct a separate review of the security company, SMG general manager Patrick Talty said in an interview Tuesday.

In the past week, the investigation concluded with the problems widespread enough that Talty and Vekich said they terminated the three-year contract "for cause."

Talty said Monterrey's records were so sloppy that it was difficult to even determine how many employees were insufficiently trained or had backgrounds that should have disqualified them from the work.

"We hire a firm under covenant and contract, expecting they will follow the regulations of the state," Talty said of Monterrey.

The firing comes five days before the Minnesota Vikings expect a sellout crowd for the Detroit Lions on Sunday. Talty said a transition plan was in place given the possible issues with Monterrey.

Yellow-shirted guards from Roseville-based Whelan Security were on duty at the building's entrances early Tuesday, checking bags and credentials.

Whelan also provided security at the Metrodome and also had bid on the contract for the stadium. Another firm, G4S will provide the 24/7/365 security of the building, Talty said.

The firms will serve out the remainder of the Monterrey contract that expires in February 2019.

Although the stadium will play host to one of the world's biggest sporting events, Super Bowl LII, on Feb. 4, Monterrey wasn't part of those plans. The NFL has its own private security firm and coordinates with the Minneapolis Police Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation because of the high level of protection required.

In a statement, Vikings COO Kevin Warren said the team was notified of the firing Monday and has confidence in Whelan and G4S.

Minnesota House State Government Finance Committee Chairwoman Sarah Anderson, R-Plymouth, pounced on the development as yet another example of faulty leadership at the stadium. She valued the Monterrey contract at \$4.2 million, a number stadium operators wouldn't confirm.

Anderson was the lead proponent for reforming the stadium leadership after the top two public officials resigned in February for using public luxury suites for their friends and family. She said the MSFA has known for years that Monterrey had problems and that she had personally raised them with the state licensing board in writing last summer.

"Any security firm for the stadium is responsible for protecting a \$1 billion public asset and, more importantly, is charged with keeping over 65,000 Minnesotans safe at any given event," she said. "Their credentials deserve more than the cursory glance given by board members more interested in private luxury suites."

Chicago-based Monterrey has 3,500 employees and provides security at Soldier and Wrigley fields in Chicago as well as football games at Notre Dame University.

After losing out on a license renewal, Gaytan said the process was unfair, that he expected SMG and the state to work with him to make needed corrections to "administrative" issues. He said just a handful of employees performing security

functions weren't properly credentialed. Gaytan, however, had a different view of security functions than what is in state law.

He also acknowledged that despite a commitment to hiring locally, the firm had bussed in some 100 workers from Chicago for the Vikings game on 9/11. Under questioning from Hodsdon, Gaytan said those workers had not been vetted or credentialed under Minnesota laws.

SMG's firing of Monterrey was a stunning development. Until now, stadium operators had acknowledged not a whiff of problems with Monterrey, which stadium operators had once touted as a Mexican-immigrant success story — a company built by its founder that hired, trained, developed and promoted minorities. But in the first year of stadium operations, concerns arose about how well it was doing its job.

On Jan. 1, in the final game of the Minnesota Vikings season two protesters dropped down from the scaffolding to unfurl a banner protesting the Dakota Access oil pipeline. The protesters had tickets to the game, but made it past security with their ropes (<http://www.startribune.com/u-s-bank-stadium-operator-says-protesters-passed-through-security-with-rope-and-tickets-to-vikings-game/409569155/>) and other gear.

Talty said protocols were followed, but the protesters snuck through.

The new security firms are conducting job fairs this Tuesday and Wednesday at U.S. Bank Stadium as well as Monday through Wednesday next week. Applications should go to the Verizon Gate of the building and bring a valid government I.D. Talty encouraged qualified Monterrey employees to apply.

"It's an unfortunate situation for employees that work for Monterrey," Talty said. "From a human standpoint, I feel bad for them."

The number of employees Monterrey used at the stadium has never been released because of security concerns. But Talty said the entire game day operational staff is 3,000 with about 1,000 of them involved in concessions.

It is extremely rare for the state board to deny or revoke the license of a security firm. Monterrey can reapply for a state license and Gaytan said he will do so.

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