

R'ville police re-certified to give breathalyzer tests

By JALEH HAGIGH
Journal staff writer

Rockville city police officers have resumed giving suspected drunk drivers breath tests after state officials inspected and re-certified the department Friday.

City officers were prevented from using the breathalyzer when they failed to follow a state regulation that requires the results of twice-monthly machine tests be sent to the state. The tests are conducted to ensure that the machine's readings are accurate.

The state suspended their powers after an inspection Tuesday. Officials said there is nothing wrong with the machine and that the proper tests were completed.

The state notified the city in August and September of the missing reports. It is unclear why those warnings were ignored.

Friday's re-certification followed a flurry of action by Mayor Steven Van Grack and city officials who made sure the missing reports were col-

lected and handed to state inspectors Friday. Originally, police did not think the department would be re-certified until Nov. 1.

Re-certification allows city officers and county officers from the Rockville district station to conduct the tests in the city station. County police had planned to use the city's unit for several weeks while their station is being renovated.

"It's obvious that the state stepped in and saw there was a need and got this unit back into operation," Van Grack said. "It showed that you can get things done and cut through red tape."

Van Grack credited Dr. John Smialek, the state medical examiner, with helping the city to get its certification back quickly.

"I think he deserves the kudos," Van Grack said. "He addressed the problem and wanted to get through the red tape."

"I really appreciate the support from the state," said Chief Jared Stout. "Operationally, it brings us

back in time for a Friday night and within reach of our full capacity."

Before re-certifying the department, state officials collected the missing reports and verified they were prepared adequately, Stout said. They also tested the breathalyzer and found the readings were accurate.

Van Grack said many questions in the incident remain unanswered, including why no one in the department responded to the state's warnings and why Stout knew nothing of the problem.

"Those answers will be made," he said. "There may be someone who was primarily responsible but, when you're the head of the department, you share in the credit when things are good and share in the blame when things are poor."

Van Grack credited Stout for moving quickly to resolve the problem.

Before Friday's decision, city officials had worked out a compromise which would have allowed county officers to operate the city's machine in the city station.