

\$100K Of Missing Wine Was Never Missing

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KATHY McCORMACK, Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — New Hampshire's attorney general says the apparent disappearance of about \$100,000 in wine from a state-run liquor store has been solved — it was never missing.

Last December, extra cases of wine were found in the stockroom during an audit at the New Hampshire Liquor and Wine Outlet in Portsmouth. The wine had no invoice or paperwork, and days later it was gone, with no indication of where it went.

Attorney General Michael Delaney said in a report Wednesday that no wine ever went missing from the store. He said state Liquor Commission employees misinterpreted a spreadsheet created during the store's move from one location to another.

Delaney said commission employees interpreted the spreadsheet as an inventory of excess wine in the store.

"However, that spreadsheet was not a documentation of actual wine on the premises," Delaney wrote. "It was an itemization of sales tags that had no direct correlation to wine actually in the store."

He said misunderstandings about the spreadsheet were reported up to leadership at the Liquor Commission and led to concerns that excess wine was first present in the store and then subsequently disappeared.

"A careful review of Liquor Commission inventory records dispels this misunderstanding and does not reveal any unaccounted-for wine ever present at the store in the first place," the report said. "Accordingly, there is no evidence that any criminal conduct occurred" during the store move.

The report also disputed the actual number of cases of wine found — at one point it was reported as 300 — and their value. It said in the end, the confusion was a result of two separate issues: a "significant amount" of excess wine that was tracked through inventory, but was not planned for the "new set" of wine products to be listed in the new store, and "erroneously sorted" sales tags believed to represent products that were physically present in the store. The issues were "merged" during the store move.

The report said there were actually 2,254 bottles of wine not included in the new set that were initially in shopping carts and on backroom shelves. They were whittled down to about 100 to 200 bottles by the end of the move. The wine was either sold, transferred out of the store, or stayed in the backroom.

The commission and Gov. John Lynch asked the attorney general's office to

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investigate. The commission said it was dissatisfied with earlier investigations by its s Enforcement Bureau and the Rockingham County attorney's office.

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