



## U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney  
Northern District of Illinois*

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*Patrick J. Fitzgerald  
United States Attorney*

*Federal Building  
219 South Dearborn Street, 5th Floor  
Chicago, Illinois 60604  
(312) 353-5300*

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PRESS CONTACTS:  
AUSA April Perry (312) 886-5966  
Randall Samborn (312) 353-5318

### **CITY INSPECTOR CHARGED WITH BRIBERY IN PROBE OF CROOKED PERMITS**

CHICAGO – A city of Chicago building inspector was arrested today on federal charges for allegedly accepting a \$1,000 cash bribe from a cooperating contractor to approve an inspection at a residential construction site, federal law enforcement officials and the city’s Inspector General announced today. The defendant, **Jose Hernandez**, allegedly solicited cash bribes totaling tens of thousands of dollars from contractors, developers and homeowners since at least 2005, according to a criminal complaint unsealed this afternoon. The case is part of an ongoing federal corruption investigation, code-named *Operation Crooked Code*, which became public in 2007 and has resulted in previous charges against two dozen defendants, including 12 city inspectors.

Hernandez, 46, of Chicago, a building inspector in Chicago’s Department of Buildings since 1988 and currently assigned to the bureau of new construction, was released on his own recognizance after appearing before Magistrate Judge Michael Mason in U.S. District Court. A status hearing was set for 2 p.m. on Aug. 20.

According to the complaint affidavit, Hernandez has had an allegedly corrupt relationship with a permit “expediter” since approximately late 2005, and with a contractor since 2007, both of whom are now cooperating in the ongoing investigation. The complaint charges Hernandez with

accepting one specific \$1,000 bribe from the cooperating contractor on Aug. 21, 2008, when Hernandez performed what's known as a "rough inspection" — an inspection of the framing, electrical wiring, plumbing and ventilation ducts before the interior walls are sealed — at a single-family residence on South Throop in Chicago. At the time of the inspection, the interior walls were covered with drywall, rendering a legitimate inspection impossible, but Hernandez signed the building permit, saying "rough frame approved," the charges allege.

During their conversation just after exchanging the bribe payment, Hernandez asked if the cooperating contractor had heard about the trouble that had befallen others, including the cooperating expediter, relating to charges that were brought earlier last year against other inspectors, contractors and expeditors, according to the complaint.

The arrest and charges were announced by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; Thomas P. Brady, Postal Inspector-in-Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service in Chicago; Robert D. Grant, Special Agent-in-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and David Hoffman, Inspector General for the City of Chicago.

Anyone with information about alleged corruption in the city permit process is encouraged to contact the City Inspector General's Office either through their hotline – (866) 448-4754, or through their web site at [www.chicagoinspectorgeneral.org](http://www.chicagoinspectorgeneral.org)

The government is being represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys April Perry, Juliet Sorensen and Christopher Hotaling.

If convicted, Hernandez faces a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. The Court, however, would determine the appropriate sentence to be imposed under the advisory United States Sentencing Guidelines.

The public is reminded that a complaint contains only charges and is not evidence of guilt. The defendant is presumed innocent and is entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

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