

Oakland to pay \$4.6 million in strip search cases

By Matthew Artz Oakland Tribune Contra Costa Times

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OAKLAND -- Council members voted Tuesday to pay \$4.6 million in damages to 39 plaintiffs who accused Oakland police of illegally strip-searching them in public between 2002 and 2009.

"It's been a very long time for many of our guys for this acknowledgment," the plaintiffs' attorney Michael Haddad said. "This settlement is vindication of their rights and their claims."

Council members Ignacio De La Fuente and Jane Brunner voted against the settlement. De La Fuente said during Tuesday's council meeting that Oakland can't "allow the settlements to continue."

The city has paid out nearly \$19 million over the last two fiscal years in connection with claims and lawsuits -- a major issue in last week's city attorney election. More than half of the payouts involved the police department.

The most recent settlement came after two men successfully sued the city after they were strip-searched at a busy West Oakland intersection. In that case the city ended up paying \$245,000 to the two victims and \$832,000 to their attorneys, John Burriss and Haddad.

Haddad said the strip-search cases have ranged from officers pulling down a suspect's pants in public to officers also pulling down a suspect's underwear and inspecting the rectum.

Oakland has since revised its strip-search policy, but Haddad said it still gives officers broad powers to conduct searches in public, especially for parolees.

"If we can't agree on a policy," he said, "we're going to have to take them back to court."

Contact Matthew Artz at 510-208-6435.