

OAKLAND

Suit alleges police did strip searches in public

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In the latest of several suits over strip searches, seven men have filed a \$5 million federal civil rights lawsuit against the city of Oakland, saying officers conducted invasive and illegal strip searches of them in public.

In the suit filed Wednesday in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, the plaintiffs said police officers pulled down their pants and exposed their genitalia or buttocks on the street during incidents from 2005 to 2007.

The searches allegedly occurred in public throughout the city, including along West MacArthur Boulevard and Martin Luther King Jr. Way -- both major thoroughfares in West Oakland -- and near the intersections of 89th Avenue and Plymouth Street and of International Boulevard and 50th Avenue, according to the suit.

"Plaintiffs suffered severe and extreme emotional distress, fear, terror, anxiety, humiliation and loss of their sense of security, dignity and pride as United States citizens," the suit says. "Plaintiffs were illegally strip-searched by the defendant officers noted herein without any just provocation or probable cause."

Erica Harrold, spokeswoman for Oakland City Attorney John Russo, said the allegations "are very serious" and reserved further comment until city officials had a chance to review the complaint.

The suit was filed by Oakland civil rights attorneys John Burris and Michael Haddad, who have filed five other similar suits on behalf of eight other men.

"Oakland is the only police department of which we, and the OPD, are aware that has a written policy allowing officers to conduct strip searches on the street," Haddad said Thursday. "We contend that such searches are clearly unconstitutional."

"These humiliating searches are made worse" by the apparent singling out by police of African Americans that are searched, Haddad said. All but one of the plaintiffs in this suit are African American.

Burris said the practice "undermines the relationship" between police and the community. The suit was filed the same day that another suit was filed accusing Alameda County of illegally strip-searching youths at Juvenile Hall in San Leandro.

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/03/30/BAG4NOUOVE1.DTL>

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