

L.A. building inspector gets prison for taking bribes



A city of Los Angeles building inspector who pleaded guilty to accepting bribes during an FBI sting operation was sentenced Monday to 21 months in prison.

Raoul Germain, 60, of Altadena was “very remorseful” about his deeds but also did not cooperate with federal investigators trying to determine the extent of corruption within the Department of Building and Safety, said his lawyer, Steven Cron. Asked why Germain did not help with the FBI probe, Cron responded: “What do you think happens to someone who cooperates?”

“There is certainly the possibility of danger to oneself or one’s family,” the lawyer added.

Germain was one of two men caught on tape accepting bribes involving multiple building sites in South L.A. In exchange for thousands of dollars, Germain signed off on electrical work, plumbing, framing and fire sprinklers — sometimes without visiting the construction sites, according to an affidavit filed by FBI agents.

Prosecutors recommended the 21-month sentence. Germain had asked for a lighter sentence, appealing to U.S. District Judge Christina A. Snyder in a personal letter. Snyder declined the request.

“I recognize that Mr. Germain is 60 years of age,” she said. “I think, however, that the offense is one that is serious.”

Cron said his client had a “short-term lapse of judgment” and felt he “lost the best job he ever had because he got greedy.”

Assistant U.S. Atty. Joseph Akrotirianakis declined to respond to Cron’s comment concerning the dangers of cooperating with federal agents. But he said that “as a very general matter,” cooperating with investigators can make someone angry. “I don’t know of any facts that suggest that the danger is more particular in this case,” he said.

Sentencing for Hugo Gonzalez, a second city inspector who pleaded guilty, is scheduled for Oct. 3, Akrotirianakis said.

In addition to Germain and Gonzalez, two other Building and Safety employees have been fired in the wake of recent investigations. One of them, Frank Rojas, is asking the city's civil service commission to overturn his termination.

A federal grand jury has demanded personnel records for a dozen Building and Safety employees, including Gonzalez and Germain.

Photos: Federal prosecutors say photo shows Raoul Joseph Germain taking a bribe. Credit: FBI