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Hacking alleged at Near North Insurance

By Ray Gibson
Tribune staff reporter
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A former employee of Near North Insurance Brokerage Inc. was sued today in federal court for allegedly illegally accessing tens of thousands of the company's most private e-mails and providing their contents to competitors.

The Chicago-based brokerage firm has asked the U.S. Attorney's office and FBI to launch an investigation, and the firm's lawsuit seeks \$645,000 in damages.

Fred Foreman, the chairman of the company, said in a press release that none of the customers' records had been tampered with or modified.

Two other former Near North employees were allegedly involved in the scheme and were named as co-defendants.

Near North employees discovered the alleged hacking in May. The lawsuit contends that three days after David Cheley was let go at Near North, he improperly accessed Near North's computer system eight times.

In September, he began a new job and repeatedly accessed Near North's system over several months. The lawsuit contends that between March 12 and April 17 of this year Cheley accessed 20,000 Near North e-mails messages marked "important" or "confidential" or "urgent," the lawsuit said.

The content of the alleged stolen e-mails were given to Near North's competitors, potential business partners, and organizations involved in litigation against the company, according to the complaint.

Cheley couldn't be reached for comment. Also named in the lawsuit were Craig Jongsma and Douglas Sikora, who also couldn't be reached for comment. A spokesman said both employees knew they were going to be losing their jobs before the hacking was discovered. The lawsuit accuses Sikora of withholding telephone records that linked Cheley to the scheme.

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