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## Justice Department to launch formal investigation of Wen Ho Lee case

September 20, 2000 Web posted at: 2:09 PM EDT (1809 GMT)

From CNN Producer Terry Frieden

WASHINGTON (CNN) -- The Justice Department announced Friday it will launch a formal investigation into the handling of the investigation and prosecution of former Los Alamos scientist Wen Ho Lee.

The investigation will be conducted by the Justice Department's Office of

Professional Responsibility, which oversees the conduct of federal prosecutors, and has the authority to review the attorney general's actions.

The decision to launch a potentially wide-ranging review was reached in Attorney General Janet Reno's midday meeting with President Clinton at the White House, and only hours after Reno appeared to suggest to reporters that no major Justice probe was planned.

Senior Justice Department officials insisted the proposal for the investigation was made by Reno, not by Clinton. The starting point for the investigation will be the harsh criticisms directed at the Justice Department by the federal (Sept. 14) judge in New Mexico who presided over the case and approved the plea agreement which freed Lee.

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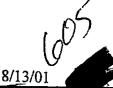
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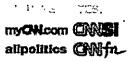


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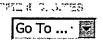
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Judge James Parker was especially critical of the government for its months-long insistence that Lee was a national security risk, followed by its sudden acceptance of a plea agreement that set him free.

Reno's statement released Friday afternoon made only oblique reference to the judge's comments.

"Consistent with our normal practice following criticism by a court, I have asked our Office of Professional Responsibility to review the matter so that the public can have confidence in the justice system," Reno said.

Earlier Friday, Reno had indicated she personally would deal with any questions in an informal way.

says Wen Ho Lee faces a year of further interrogation over still-missing files (Sept. 13)



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WEATHER "I will continue to look at it and, as people ask questions about it, look at it and try to respond to those questions," Reno said at a morning press briefing. US Zip

Reno also said President Clinton had been supportive of the Justice Department in their telephone conversation on the issue Wednesday.

"Dedicated lawyers and investigators worked very hard on this case," Reno said in her written statement announcing the investigation. "I want to be as open as possible about the work they did, as well as about the decisions I< made."

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