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Geological-survey boss quits amid controversy

He may have alienated lawmakers and Babbitt

BY ALAN GATHRIGHT
Mercury News Staff Writer

U.S. Geological Survey Director Gordon P. Eaton announced his retirement Wednesday as congressional criticism and legal action mounted over the threatened closure of the agency's Menlo Park office.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt and some Menlo Park colleagues praised Eaton for successfully guiding the agency through three stormy years, which included sparing the agency from abolishment by congressional Republicans and a painful downsizing.

But others say Eaton was ousted because he bungled an Aug. 21 memo. The memo outlined the suggested relocation of the Menlo Park agency, and Eaton had failed to warn Bay Area congressional representatives that it was coming. He also faced increasing heat for a massive 1995 layoff that has come under criminal investigation and civil challenges.

Eaton's memo said Babbitt ordered USGS to consider moving from the 16-acre Menlo Park site to outside the Bay Area to avoid skyrocketing rents.

The agency, which is responsible for warning Californians about earthquakes and doing research to avoid quake damage, employs 800 at the Menlo Park office after buyouts and layoffs cut the staff by a third.

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