Yet another Boynton Beach police officer was arrested Friday -- the third this week -- this time for allegedly lying on an arrest report about how a gun was found, the State Attorney's Office said.

Officer Alex Lindsey, 28, was arrested and charged with official misconduct, and faces up to five years in prison if convicted.

On Tuesday, Officer Michael Mulcahy, 29, and former officer Michael Arco, 26, turned themselves in at the Palm Beach County Jail. Their arrests stem from an internal police investigation that found they lied about the details of an arrest they made.

Experts say such a spate of officer corruption shouldn't paint an entire department as corrupt, but it does mean some hard questions need to be asked by the police chief.

"You have to have an ethical environment that the agency really demonstrates from the top down. That shows it doesn't tolerate misconduct," said Eugene O'Donnell, professor of police studies at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. "It has to be more than words. They have to live by ethics and not just preach about it. There's a lot of preaching but not a lot of follow through."

For his part, Police Chief Matthew Immler said this week's arrests show that bad cops in the department are being rooted out.

"The importance of this investigation is that we are able to determine and detect when something like this happens," Immler said. "When this does happen and we find out about it, then we do prosecute these officers."

After a rash of arrests there may be a temptation for a department-wide crackdown, O'Donnell said, but the department has to be careful to weed out only those cops who don't deserve to be in a police uniform.

A lot of officers suffer from "noble-cause corruption," experts said. They bend or break some rules in order to make an arrest.

"Police are corrupt in a goal because they think it's a worthy goal," O'Donnell said. Those police think, "So what? He's a felon. I'm protecting the public."
Police might falsify reports or information when arresting someone because they want to make sure a criminal stays behind bars, said Jeanne Stinchcomb, a Florida Atlantic University criminology professor.

"You can test for IQ, you can test for physical fitness but there's no instrument that enables you to determine how strong a person's ethics are," Stinchcomb said.

It's not easy to change a widespread culture of corruption within a police department, Stinchcomb said, unless the police chief and top ranks send a strong message that it won't be tolerated.

"If I were the chief, I would be asking myself: Are we doing something to encourage misconduct or are these really isolated incidents?" Stinchcomb said.

Richard Mangan, another criminology professor at FAU, said a culture of corruption usually is to blame. Superiors might give recruits the sense that they don't care, or might even encourage corrupt behavior.

This could lead new officers to look the other way if they see misconduct, fearing repercussions.

"They know that if you rat on an officer, you're toast," Mangan said. "Everybody's going to look at you like a snitch."

Instead of showing widespread corruption, the three arrests this week show the Police Department's "commitment to the profession and the community," Immler said.

In December, Lindsey arrested Jeffrey Pugh, 42, of Boynton Beach, on drug and gun charges.

During trial preparation, a copy of the booking video was requested, and Lindsey admitted he lied about how the gun was found, according to his arrest report.

Lindsey didn't find the gun while searching Pugh at the crime scene. He found it on him later, at the police station. But in his report, he said the gun was found at the scene.

Lindsey told authorities he lied because he got into trouble last year for missing contraband on another suspect. In that case, a suspect was found with 2.9 grams of marijuana stuffed in her shoe as she was booked into jail, records show.

The outcome of Pugh's criminal case is unclear. He was charged with possession of a gun by a convicted felon, possession of cocaine, marijuana and drug paraphernalia and carrying a concealed firearm.

Pugh was released from prison in April 2010 after serving three years on an earlier cocaine conviction, state records show.

Lindsey, who was hired in 2008, remains on administrative duty as the investigation continues,
police said.

Mulcahy, who was hired in 2006, also is on administrative duty. He was charged with one count of official misconduct and one count of making a false official statement. Arco, who was hired in 2005, faces one count of official misconduct and one count of written perjury. He resigned in February.

Mulcahy and Arco claimed they knocked on the motel door of an armed-robbery suspect and arrested him as he tried to back away. But investigators say the door was unlocked by a motel manager at the officers' request.

They had no authority to enter the room without a search warrant, police said.

"What happened here, essentially, is officers who took a shortcut," Immler said in a news conference Friday. "They knew the rules. They knew the constitutional provisions that have to be followed and they decided not to follow them.

"When they attempt to cover it up, they step across the line," he said. "They commit a crime, and when they commit a crime we're going to do what we have to do."

In early July, the Boynton Beach police 2010 Officer of the Year was indicted on federal meth trafficking charges.

David Britto, 28, pleaded not guilty to the charges and was ordered to live under curfew and with an ankle monitor at his mother's house in Coral Springs pending court proceedings.

On Sunday, Officer Kenneth Magielski was charged with DUI in Martin County while off duty.

Magielski, 56, reportedly was intoxicated when he crashed his car into the gate of a development in Palm City, deputies said. He also is on paid administrative duty pending the outcome of the case.

Staff Researcher Barbara Hijek contributed to this report.