
Audit finds waste, mischief in 911 agency

By Hal Dardick
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Hundreds of thousands of dollars were wasted, employees were put on hidden payrolls and notebook computers went missing at the city department that oversees Chicago's 911 center, according to an audit released Thursday by Inspector General Joseph Ferguson.

All of those issues occurred because "internal controls were not adequate to prevent waste and misconduct," according to the audit of the Office of Emergency Management and Communications.

The new round of criticism comes after Ferguson's October

report that concluded 911 center officials falsified paperwork to give a \$23 million digital-radio contract to a pre-selected firm.

The agency's problems "reflect a long-running and pervasive failure of management," the audit states. It alleges a series of costly errors, saying some have been addressed and others still need attention:

■ From January 2008 through September 2009, frequent "voucher manipulation" led to nearly \$14 million worth of unauthorized purchases, according to the audit. "Such manipulation had evolved into a standard operating procedure," it states.

■ In one case, the city paid twice for electronic equipment that

cost \$80,000 and was improperly purchased, the audit states. In another case, the city paid \$127,000 to one company that in turn issued payments to two other unauthorized companies, keeping a \$6,000 fee in what the watchdog described as a "blatant pass-through operation."

■ A company was paid \$12,000 for travel expenses that included a \$2,000 "up-charge" listed as "hardware/software maintenance," the audit found.

■ Dozens of employees who worked directly for the department were paid through contractors instead of the official city payroll, costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars. The inspector general called the

ongoing practice an "end-run around the hiring rules."

■ About \$19,000 worth of nearly 40 printers, seven notebook computers and a digital camera could not be found. Some of the items were bought through manipulated vouchers, the audit found.

The department cooperated with the audit and has taken steps to improve contract oversight, track inventory and pare contract consultants, an agency spokesman said in a written statement. "We are committed to following the policies of the city of Chicago while fulfilling" the department's responsibilities, the statement read.

hdardick@tribune.com

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