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911 official resigns over blunder that cost \$2 mil.

Was about to be fired after inspector general's recommendation

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The No. 2 man at Chicago's 911 emergency center has resigned his \$149,832-a-year job to avoid being fired for alleged contract irregularities that cost taxpayers \$2.25 million.

Jim Argiropoulos, who once served as acting executive director of the Office of Emergency Management and Communications, quietly cleared out his desk over the weekend. The resignation takes effect later this month after time-due is burned.

"They allowed him to retire before they dropped the bomb on him," said a source familiar with the resignation.

If Argiropoulos had not resigned, the source said, "He would have been fired. They had no choice. If they ignore the inspector general's recommendation, it looks bad. And they had a lot of stuff on him."

Argiropoulos could not be reached for comment. The resignation has no impact on his city pension, which would only be cut off in the event of a felony conviction "arising out of or in connection with" his city job, according to state law.

The inspector general's office recommended in late September that Argiropoulos be fired for allegedly engineering a scheme that culminated in the falsification of documents to expedite the purchase of a new 911 dispatch console system from Schaumburg-based Motorola.

Without a contract to justify the console purchase -- and apparently unwilling to wade through the normal bidding process -- Argiropoulos allegedly ordered underlings to find a way to get it done. As a result, a phony voucher was issued for 18,000 radio accessories under an existing Motorola contract.

In fact, no such radio accessories were ever delivered to OEMC, nor did the city need them.

Chicago taxpayers have yet to receive anything for their money. The new console system that Argiropoulos portrayed after a 2004 system failure as a matter of life-and-death has yet to be delivered.

No sooner had the company started ordering software than Argiropoulos allegedly demanded an upgrade, with the \$2.25 million payment applied to the new system.

When Motorola balked at the demand, Argiropoulos allegedly played hardball: If Motorola refused to go along, its future city contracts would be in jeopardy, the inspector general's report contended.

The alleged irregularities took place in 2004 and 2005 while Chicago Public Schools CEO Ron Huberman was running OEMC.

Huberman has accepted responsibility for what the inspector general has called a "significant management failure" that set the stage for the contracting scheme.

Sources said he has also ordered Adrienne Hiegel, his top deputy at OEMC at the time, to take a 30-day suspension.

The inspector general's office has said Hiegel was so complicit in the phony voucher scheme, she should be fired if she still worked for the city. She was specifically accused of directing underlings to "work backwards to get to \$2.25 million -- the cost of developing the

Motorola software -- by using 18,000 radio parts to add up to" the same amount.

Hiegel has followed Huberman from OEMC to City Hall to the CTA to the Chicago Public Schools.

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