

Spotlight

Department of Homeland Security



Office of Inspector General

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Why This Matters

At the request of Representative Mike Quigley and Senator Mark Steven Kirk, we audited the Urban Areas Security Initiative grant funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to the Illinois Emergency Management Agency for Project Shield. The project was for interoperable communication equipment in Cook County, and it was intended to enable first responders to capture and share ongoing video and data from wireless-equipped first responder vehicles or base station monitors located in 128 municipalities within Cook County. Between fiscal years 2003 and 2009, Cook County was reimbursed approximately \$45 million in federal grants for the installation and maintenance of Project Shield equipment.

DHS Response

FEMA concurred with our four recommendations. FEMA will coordinate with the State of Illinois and Cook County to prepare an action plan to identify obligated and unobligated balances, existing technology gaps and hardware/software issues, and personnel training gaps. During the plan development, new expenditures for the project will be temporarily put on hold. Based on these results, FEMA will coordinate with the State of Illinois and Cook County to establish a future action plan to include a revised project scope, budget, timeline, and reporting requirements.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@dhs.gov

Homeland Security Grant Program Funds Awarded for Project Shield

What We Determined

Urban Areas Security Initiative grant funds for Project Shield were not spent efficiently or effectively. The Urban Area Working Group and Cook County did not adequately plan or manage the project to ensure that the equipment worked properly; the system could be operated in an emergency situation; and the costs were reasonable, allowable, and allocable. This occurred in part because FEMA did not adequately ensure that the State of Illinois effectively monitored Cook County's expenditures of grant funds for Project Shield. As a result, Project Shield was not implemented effectively, and millions of tax dollars may have been wasted on equipment that does not perform as intended.

Minimal planning occurred prior to implementation of Project Shield. The equipment failed during extreme hot and cold temperatures, was not always targeted at the most critical infrastructure, and at times prevented first responders from accessing critical databases needed to perform their jobs. Project Shield funds were not always used appropriately in achieving the project's goals and objectives, such as the transmission of video from vehicle cameras, and Cook County was not always in compliance with federal regulations and agency administrative requirements.

What We Recommend

Assistant Administrator, Grant Programs Directorate, FEMA require the State of Illinois to:

- Develop a review process for new technology projects to ensure that they are properly evaluated prior to project planning, design, and implementation.
- Discontinue funding of Project Shield until the grantee can ensure that the mobile equipment can be operated effectively.
- Determine that Project Shield costs are reasonable, allowable, and allocable.
- Ensure that the grantee performs adequate oversight of Urban Areas Security Initiative projects implemented by subgrantees, including compliance with grant regulatory and administrative requirements.