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IGO Publishes Audit of CPD Evidence Section

The City of Chicago Office of Inspector General (IGO) has released an audit of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) Evidence and Recovered Property Section (ERPS).

The IGO audit found that CPD's internal controls for ERPS failed to ensure that evidence and property were adequately protected, properly documented, and readily available when required. IGO audit testing revealed that ERPS personnel could not locate a significant volume of evidence and property held in CPD custody. While conducting the audit, the IGO determined that CPD had weaknesses in several areas that may have contributed to the shortfalls found in the audit. These included:

- A lack of written policies and procedures for day-to-day operation of the ERPS;
- No documented response to recommendations made to remedy operational deficiencies in the ERPS found in a 2005 internal audit conducted by CPD's Auditing and Internal Control Division;
- Present operations address only one of the eight recommendations advanced in the 2005 report; and
- A CPD directive designed to promote accurate recording and timely transfer of inventory to ERPS facilities was not being followed.

"Our findings show that this is not a new problem," said Inspector General Joe Ferguson. "CPD has, for years, struggled to manage its evidence and recovered property inventory. We hope CPD is able to use our audit in their efforts to remedy an area of longstanding institutional and operational neglect that carries the potential to compromise court proceedings in a number of ways."

Ways in which a weak ERPS section is detrimental to CPD operations and legal proceedings include:

- The potential for compromising of court proceedings—criminal and civil litigation—and administrative hearings due to inventoried evidence items that cannot be located;

- Possible challenges to the admission of and risk of suppression of even those evidence items that can be located as a result of the absence of formal written policies and procedures governing their handling and administration;
- Risk of potential litigation and damages awards against the City for property owners who are unable to recover lost or misplaced property held and maintained in CPD ERPS custody;
- Risk to the public safety and welfare posed by the loss (including the possible theft) of dangerous items in ERPS custody.

CPD agreed with the audit findings, and has already started to fulfill its commitment to address these problems by:

- Establishing a task force that will, in addition to other ERPS improvement duties, update the current “e Track” inventory system, which will ensure an accurate accounting of all inventoried property is maintained within the “e Track” system;
- Implementing recommendations from a CPD 2005 Internal Audit Report;
- Establishing new processes within the overall inventorying process to ensure proper categorization of evidence and recovered property;
- Placing stringent supervisory responsibilities and increasing training for those who handle evidence and recovered property;
- Partnering with Chief Judge of the Circuit Court of Cook County and Cook County States Attorney’s Office to ensure formal release of inventoried property for disposal;
- Reducing the number of steps required for property turn-over so that “e Track” better match the new role structure as it exists at police districts.

“CPD’s success in bringing its evidence and property controls up to national standards may ultimately require additional resources,” said Ferguson. “Additionally, CPD will need the cooperation and assistance of other components of Chicago’s criminal justice community including, among others, the Cook County States Attorney’s Office.”

The recommendations, as well as the CPD response, can be found online at the IGO website: www.chicagoinspectorgeneral.org. Follow the IGO on Twitter @ChicagoIGO for the latest information on how the IGO continues to fight waste, fraud, abuse, and inefficiency in Chicago government.

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