

Second 9/11 Envisaged by Homeland Security: Emergency Procedures in the Chicago Area

By [Global Research](#)

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City quietly builds backup 911 site at O'Hare Airport

SECURITY | O'Hare site to handle calls if West Loop office attacked, damaged

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April 2, 2009

BY [FRAN SPIELMAN](#) City Hall Reporter/fspielman@suntimes.com

Amid cloak-and-dagger secrecy, the Daley administration is building a backup 911 center at O'Hare Airport to handle emergency calls if a terrorist attack or natural disaster damages Chicago's primary facility in the West Loop, City Hall sources said Wednesday.

Sources said the backup facility will be located in an O'Hare building that houses the airport's communications nerve center.

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A \$1.2 million back-up 911 center at O'Hare Airport is being funded by the U.S. Homeland Security Department. The project is so hush-hush, City Hall refused to talk about it. (Rich Hein/Sun-Times)

Rooms in that building — possibly two floors below ground — are being retrofitted into a rudimentary version of Chicago's state-of-the-art 911 center at Madison and Loomis. The work started in late January. It was not known when the work would be completed or how much it would cost.

Dispatchers and call takers will not have their own consoles at the backup facility. They will field calls while seated four-to-a-table. The project will be paid for by federal Homeland Security funds.

The project is so hush-hush, City Hall refused to talk about it.

“Post Sept. 11, all cities are making efforts to shore up their security,” said Ray Orozco, executive director of the city’s Office of Emergency Management and Communications and a former Chicago fire commissioner.

“I will neither confirm nor deny the steps we’re taking — whatever they are. I won’t do it. No one will do it. There’s a lot at stake. I try to be as open with you as I can. But, there are some things I just can’t discuss.”

Andrew Velasquez, the former 911 center chief who is now director of the Illinois Emergency Management Agency, could not be reached for comment.

Sources said the U.S. Department of Homeland Security has been pressuring City Hall for years to establish a backup 911 center because Chicago is high on the list of potential terrorist targets.

Velasquez initially offered several alternatives, all of which were unacceptable to Homeland Security.

The 311 non-emergency center was rejected as a backup site because it’s less than a mile from the 911 center and considered too close to Chicago’s central business district.

McCormick Place, Navy Pier and Chicago Park District field houses were deemed inadequate because they might be needed to shelter Chicagoans or for temporary command posts.

Velasquez also offered a portable tent that could be set up anywhere and house as many as 100 call takers and dispatchers. That idea went nowhere because Homeland Security wanted a center permanent enough to field emergency calls for weeks, if not months, in a major disaster, sources said.

Yet another plan to rent office space from AT&T went nowhere because the city and the company could not agree on rental terms.

Billed as the vanguard in emergency communications, the \$217 million 911 center opened in October 1995 and fast emerged as a worldwide model.

The original price tag of \$95 million was twice revised upward, prompting Mayor Daley to switch gears and decide to fund the project with a general obligation bond issue.

Chicago property owners will be paying for the new system until 2023 because general obligation bonds are backed by real estate taxes. A 95-cents-a-month telephone surcharge, originally billed as the primary funding source, fell short of revenues needed to retire the bonds in 1999

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