NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

Bloomberg Inherits High-Tech Gremlins

BLOOMBERG from A8

million, ran into one design and procurement problem after another. Officials long ago dubbed the old system "Starfire One" and its planned successor "Starfire Two." Today, those who use the system still call it "Starfire One and a Half."

The problem-ridden purchase of two-way radios for firefighters also drew criticism earlier this year.

The Police Department, with beefed-up budgets under Giuliani, struggled with its own technology.

Difficulties developing the Enhanced 911 system — funded through a special phone tax that has brought in more than $100 million — led to a dispute with the company building the system. Mysterious periods of silence occurred during some emergency calls, and in January 1999 the 911 system broke down from an electric outage during tests. A Queens man requiring medical aid died of a heart attack during the outage. Problems also afflicted mobile-data terminals in police cars.

One of the mayor's own task forces found earlier this year that his corruption-stained Buildings Department's record-keeping has been a shambles, with an inadequate data system.

For the public, one of the most obvious annual shortfalls has involved ballot equipment.

Bloomberg vowed during his campaign to reform the voting process by improving technology, with "ATM-like" voting machinery to get a fast and accurate count and replace the 1960s-vintage devices in use.

But such efforts sputtered through the Giuliani years.

Last year, the city finally abandoned a controversial 15-year project to purchase new voting machines, a move that left officials back at the drawing board after spending $17 million. The problems, which deadlocked the bipartisan Board of Elections long before the national voting fiasco in Florida, involved a consultant's concerns about the potential to tamper with voter tallies.

Bloomberg admits he's not a technical genius but has boasted that he knows how to get results from those who are.

In his 1997 autobiography, "Bloomberg by Bloomberg," he said it is his practice as a businessman "to insist on an explanation from the programmers of what they were trying to do before I let them do it."

"I don't have as much technical expertise as even a junior computer whiz," Bloomberg then admitted. "But that's the programmers' problem. They've got to describe it to me in language I can understand. Again and again, if that's what it takes."

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