



One Hundred Twelfth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

January 05, 2012

The Honorable W. Craig Fugate
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Fugate:

It has come to my attention that the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC), the agency responsible for administering Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) funds in 13 Michigan counties, recently spent \$11,700 of its Federal grant funding on shaved ice dessert machines ("Sno Cone" machines), which it qualified as homeland security equipment.

Monies granted to Michigan under HSGP are intended to support the State's efforts in building and sustaining the necessary capabilities to prevent, prepare for, and respond to terrorist attacks or other emergencies. Surely, equipment, the primary purpose of which is to attract residents to homeland security community events, does not meet this standard. Yet this was the justification offered by WMSRDC in making this very costly purchase.

In its official Cost Justification, the Commission stated, "This tool can [] be used at public education and outreach events to entice volunteers to stop by recruitment booths and receive public education and promotional material about Citizen Corps and preparedness activities - along with a shaved ice."¹ By this rationale, any amusements that might appeal to community residents for purposes of outreach, such as balloons, entertainers, and popcorn machines, would qualify as homeland security equipment.

I am sure we can agree that in these difficult budgetary times, we must ensure that vital homeland security grant funds are distributed based on risk and are used in a manner that enhances the security of the recipient's area. Moreover, section 2008 (B)(5) of the Homeland Security Act of 2002 expressly prohibits this kind of purchase, stating, "grants awarded under the [State Homeland Security Grant Program] may not be used for recreational or social purposes."²

WMSRDC also suggested that the dessert machines might provide emergency care to residents in the event of heat-related illnesses during the warmer months of the summer. In support of this rationale, the Commission's Cost Justification reads, "Outcome: These ice rehabilitation machines will (i) assist with treating the onset of heat exhaustion

¹ Michigan Homeland Security Grants Program, *Allowable Cost Justification*, May 9, 2011.

² 6 U.S.C. 609 (b)(5).

and stroke during large scale events or activities - including possible terrorist incidents or similar emergencies.”³ At best, this justification connecting shaved ice with a State’s response to a terrorist attack, is questionable.

Proceeding further in this vein, WMSRD Executive Director Sandeep Dey noted that the machines might be used to make icepacks, and Montcalm County Emergency Services Director, David Feldpausch recommended that the machines be referred to as “ice shavers,” rather than “Sno Cone machines,” to lend some legitimacy to their usefulness - despite the fact that the machines are emblazoned with the advertisement, “Ice Cold Sno-Cones, Refreshing.”⁴

This incident raises questions about FEMA’s oversight of HSGP funds and the concern that additional jurisdictions might be squandering homeland security funds. In light of these concerns, I would appreciate a response to the following questions by Wednesday, January 18, 2012.

1. Was FEMA aware that shaved ice dessert machines were being purchased with Homeland Security Grant Program funds? What mechanisms does FEMA have to recoup funding from jurisdictions that spend HSGP funds on improper uses? Will FEMA require the State of Michigan to sell or return the 13 dessert machines, and use the \$11,700 for a legitimate homeland security investment?
2. How will you work to ensure that future Homeland Security Grant Program investments are not squandered on equipment or other purchases that do not enhance the security of the grantee’s area?
3. What resources and mechanisms does FEMA have to track wasteful spending within the Homeland Security Grant Program?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to working with you to ensure that FEMA’s grant dollars are used to their maximum effect in ensuring that our local communities are protected, and fully prepared to respond to any threats or emergencies they may confront.

Sincerely,



GUS M. BILIRAKIS
Chairman
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness,
Response, and Communications

³ Michigan Homeland Security Grants Program, *Allowable Cost Justification*, May 9, 2011.

⁴ “Montcalm County gets homeland security snow cone machine,” Elizabeth Waldon. The Daily News, December 3, 2012. Available at <http://thedailynews.cc/2011/12/03/montcalm-county-gets-homeland-security-snow-cone-machine/>.