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STATE OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE STATE
COMPTROLLER

August 31, 1999

Mr. Edward F. Jacoby, Jr.
Director
NYS Emergency Management Office
1220 Washington Avenue
Building 22, Suite 101
Albany, NY 12226-2251

Re: Year 2000 Preparedness
Report 99-S-19

Dear Mr. Jacoby:

Pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Article V, Section 1 of the State Constitution and Article II, Section 8 of the State Finance Law, we have audited the State Emergency Management Office's efforts for helping New York State agencies and local governments to prepare for potential emergencies from the inability of computerized information systems and automated equipment to correctly process dates beyond December 31, 1999 (Year 2000 Problem). Our audit covered the period January 1998 through May 5, 1999.

A. Background

The State Emergency Management Office (SEMO) coordinates emergency management services for the State by providing leadership, planning, education and resources to mitigate the effects of emergencies and disasters on life and property. SEMO's focus and strategy for any disaster, including those arising from the Year 2000 Problem, is to manage the aftermath. In this regard, SEMO officials report that they have historically emphasized the need for counties to have emergency management plans in place for dealing with disaster aftermath. The officials report that they are now emphasizing the need for counties to update these plans to address the aftermath of Year 2000 Problem disasters. SEMO also has its own Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan, which includes a Year 2000 Problem Appendix, to guide SEMO in carrying out its responsibilities during an emergency, and to identify those responsible governmental agencies that should be involved in addressing an emergency. SEMO has been working with the State Office for Technology to ensure that State agencies develop contingency plans to cope with the Year 2000 Problem.

SEMO officials maintain that no one knows exactly what may be the extent of the Year 2000 Problem at the turn of the century, but they also acknowledge that there are numerous risks and potential threats. They are relying on the proven track record of their emergency management strategy to handle the aftermath of disasters from the Year 2000 Problem just as it has handled the aftermath of disasters arising from other causes.

B. Audit Scope, Objective and Methodology

We audited SEMO's efforts to help New York's local governments and State agencies to prepare to assume their responsibilities for managing the aftermath of emergencies related to the Year 2000 Problem. Our objective was to assess whether these efforts provide a reasonable approach for preparing for emergencies that may result from the Year 2000 Problem. Our performance audit covered the period January 1, 1998 through May 5, 1999. To accomplish our objective, we evaluated SEMO records and documentation, interviewed appropriate SEMO staff and researched the activities of other State and Federal emergency management planning organizations.

We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Such standards require that we plan and perform our audit to adequately assess those operations which are included in our audit scope. Further, these standards require that we understand SEMO's internal control structure and its compliance with those laws, rules and regulations that are relevant to the operations which are included in our audit scope. An audit includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting transactions reported in the accounting and operating records and applying such other auditing procedures as we consider necessary in the circumstances. An audit also includes assessing the estimates, judgments and decisions made by management. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our findings, conclusions and recommendation.

C. Results of Audit

As discussed more fully in the following sections of this report, SEMO has undertaken a reasonable approach to help New York's local governments and State agencies to prepare to cope with the aftermath of emergency situations that may result from the the Year 2000 Problem. For example, SEMO has been working with the Office for Technology to both develop the model Year 2000 Contingency Plan for State agencies and to train agency staff to develop their own contingency plan. SEMO has also developed a Year 2000 Appendix to be used to update the emergency management plans of counties, cities, towns and villages for the Year 2000 Problem. The steps undertaken and planned by SEMO to address the Year 2000 Problem appear to be consistent with the steps being taken by peer emergency management offices in the Federal government and in the states of California, Michigan, Texas and Florida.

D. Efforts at the State Level

At the State level, SEMO began addressing emergency planning for the Year 2000 Problem in late 1998 by working with the Office for Technology to develop the model Year 2000 Agency Contingency Plan (Contingency Plan) for State agencies. The purpose of the Contingency Plan, which provides a framework for agencies to use to respond to potential Year 2000 problems, is to ensure uninterrupted agency operations. The scope of the Contingency Plan covers risk reduction, response, and recovery efforts. It establishes operations, strategies and tactics to guide the agency's response activities, and directs agencies to use the Incident Command System, which establishes a chain of command to respond to events arising from the Year 2000 Problem. The Contingency Plan relies on criteria prepared by agency management, and on a method of operations based on agency procedures and carried out by agency personnel, who are identified according to the roles they will assume in responding to Year 2000 problems. SEMO is maintaining copies of agencies' completed Year 2000 contingency plans. SEMO has been presenting information and materials at monthly Office for Technology meetings to help train State agency staff both in developing contingency plans and in using the Incident Command System.

Further, SEMO worked with the Year 2000 Emergency Management/Preparedness Committee of the State's Disaster Preparedness Commission to develop a report on Year 2000 issues. This report provides an overview of both real and potential Year 2000 issues by functional area (e.g., transportation, human services, financial services) and discusses the "most likely" Year 2000 problems in each area. The report presents "worst case" scenarios, and identifies specific facilities, business functions and equipment determined to be at risk of Year 2000-related failure. It also develops specific response strategies, including appropriate agency roles, that will guide a State response to support "worst case" failures.

E. Efforts at the Local Level

SEMO has historically emphasized the importance of counties' having, and using, emergency management plans for responding to the aftermath of disasters. In this regard, SEMO has developed and provided a model emergency plan for counties. Each county is able to refine the model plan to address the specific situations and needs of the locality. SEMO is now emphasizing to counties the importance of updating their plans to address Year 2000-related problems. SEMO has developed a Year 2000 Appendix for these model emergency plans, and has worked with county managers to incorporate these appendices into the counties' existing plans. SEMO has also developed respective model emergency plans for cities, towns and villages, and has developed a Year 2000 Appendix for each type of plan. SEMO officials indicate that localities' emergency plans should be adequate for responding to any emergency which results from the Year 2000 problem.

SEMO has been providing technical assistance to the county emergency managers through regional monthly meetings with these managers. SEMO officials indicate that they have been discussing the Year 2000 issue since the January 1999 meeting. In addition, SEMO performs

“tabletop” contingency exercises (discussions of responses to hypothetical emergency situations) with State agencies and local governments, and provides training and assistance when requested.

SEMO has also begun to provide individual citizens with information about preparation for the Year 2000. For example, SEMO has regularly distributed a pamphlet about winter emergencies that indicates the steps to follow in the event of a disaster. SEMO officials are now specifically including this information in presentations on Year 2000 preparedness, and are assuring the public that these steps should be adequate to prepare for any emergencies that arise. In addition, SEMO is participating in various local government panel conferences, presentations and seminars intended to increase the public’s awareness and preparation. To increase the public’s access to Year 2000 information, SEMO’s Internet Website provides links to the American Red Cross Website. The Red Cross Website lists guidelines for individuals to follow to prepare for the Year 2000 Problem. SEMO officials also report that New York State, with the assistance of SEMO and the Office for Technology, has just launched a Year 2000 Website that will act as a clearinghouse for Year 2000 information and will provide a variety of links to other Year 2000-related issues.

F. Efforts of Other States and the Federal Government

To determine how SEMO’s efforts to address emergency management of the Year 2000 Problem compare with those of similar entities in other states and in the Federal government, we reviewed the pertinent information posted on the websites of the states of California, Michigan, Texas and Florida. We also reviewed pertinent information posted on the website of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Based on our review, it appears that SEMO is using the same approach as its peers with regard to emergency planning for the Year 2000: that is, these organizations are primarily reenforcing emergency planning processes which are already in place, and are ensuring these plans will be sufficient to deal with emergencies which may arise due to the Year 2000.

Recommendation

Continue with ongoing preparation and emergency planning for the Year 2000.

A draft copy of this report was provided to SEMO officials for their review and comment. SEMO officials stated that the audit accurately summarizes the State’s planning efforts related to Year 2000 preparedness and that they will continue to work closely with the Office for Technology to ensure State preparedness for any emergencies that may arise. A copy of their response is included as Appendix A.

Within 90 days after the final release of this report, as required by Section 170 of the Executive Law, the Director of the State Emergency Management Office shall report to the Governor, the State Comptroller and the leaders of the Legislature and the fiscal committees, advising what steps were taken to implement the recommendation contained herein, and if the recommendation has not been implemented, the reasons therefor.

Major contributors to this report were Brian Reilly, Michael Farrar, Nadine Morrell and Jerrold Steigman.

We wish to thank the management and staff at the State Emergency Management Office for the courtesies and cooperation extended to our auditors during this audit.

Very truly yours,

Jerry Barber
Audit Director

cc: Mr. Charles Conaway



Edward F. Jacoby, Jr., Director

New York State Emergency Management Office
1220 Washington Avenue
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Albany, NY 12226-2251

August 19, 1999

Mr. Jerry Barber
Audit Director
Office of the State Comptroller
A. E. Smith State Office Building
Albany, NY 12236

Dear Mr. Barber:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your recent audit regarding the New York State's efforts related to Year 2000 Preparedness. (Report 99-S-19)

This audit accurately summarizes State's planning efforts related to Year 2000 preparedness.

As the year progresses, the New York State Emergency Management Office will continue to work closely with the Office for Technology to ensure State preparedness for any emergencies that may arise.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward F. Jacoby, Jr.", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Edward F. Jacoby, Jr., Director
State Emergency Management Office

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