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In the last five years, Cook County has gotten nearly \$43 million from the U.S. Homeland Security Department for Project Shield, a program that's supposed to equip all 128 suburbs countywide with state-of-the-art video cameras.

The aim: to provide immediate live video from police cars and other locations to a central command in case of terrorism or other emergency. Backers say that would let authorities move quickly to provide police and rescue workers with vital information.

But Project Shield remains dogged by problems, a Chicago Sun-Times/NBC5 investigation found. Already 36 percent over budget, the massive effort now isn't expected to be fully operational until 2011 -- three years late. Even then, it could be without a number of suburbs that opted out because of problems.

**"I think the federal government has to investigate what's happened with Project Shield so far and re-evaluate its effectiveness," said U.S. Rep. Mike Quigley (D-Ill.), a former Cook County commissioner who's asking the Government Accountability Office to investigate. "And if it decides it is not working, it's going to have to start over, with someone else overseeing the entire project."**

In all, Cook County has been awarded more than \$100 million from the Homeland Security Department since 2003 as a response to the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Not all of that has been received, or spent. When terrorists struck, a lack of accurate, immediate communication hampered first responders. Project Shield is Cook County's answer to that.

Begun in the administration of the late Cook County Board President John Stroger, Project Shield was to be completed in three phases, at a cost of \$31.5 million. As of August, the county has spent \$42,961,306.38 on Project Shield.

Stroger's office declined our requests for interviews of those in charge of Project Shield.

IBM got the Phase 1 and 2 contract. On Aug. 7, 2006, Dan Coughlin, executive director of the Cook County Judicial Advisory Council, which oversees the grants, said the "system . . . has been extensively tested and is now operational in 27 municipalities."

But two years later, after spending \$26 million and still suffering with technical problems, IBM --

which declined requests for an interview -- was dumped.

**According to Quigley, a key subcontractor filed for bankruptcy -- after installing cameras that didn't work.**

IBM was replaced last year by Johnson Controls, and, as of July, the county boasted that 90 first-responder vehicles had cameras.

The cameras are working in Evanston, Elmwood Park, Glencoe and Palatine. But other police departments have complained of problems -- including cameras that don't work. As a result, Berwyn, Forest Park, Morton Grove, Norridge, Park Ridge, Tinley Park and University Park have abandoned Project Shield.

**"Every municipality in the county was supposed to be involved," said Quigley. "If you leave several out . . . it's useless."**

In Oak Park, two police cars now have cameras. "You would dispatch those two cars and . . . could have a clear view of what is occurring there, and then make some valid decisions," said Oak Park Police Chief Rick Tanksley.

He's a supporter. Still, at a recent demonstration, the video from a patrol car driving down a street was so bad it was impossible at times to clearly see.

Oak Park is home to one of three mobile command vans for Project Shield. Each cost \$400,000. But the vans haven't been tested to see if they can communicate with one another, according to Tanksley, and can't access other cameras.

"Money has been allocated for that," Tanksley said, "and we hope, in the next six months, to have that achieved."

**With all that's been spent, Quigley said, all that's been gained is "the feeling of being safer."**