

# Report: Indian bureau has bad data

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Bad data entry in a system for schools' maintenance and repair information could cost the Bureau of Indian Affairs millions.

A study conducted from June 2002 through last month by the General Accounting Office found that almost half of the data entries in the bureau's 3-year-old Facilities Management and Information System are inaccurate and incomplete. The system holds data for more than 2,000 school buildings run by the agency.

If data is accurate, the system can work, the report said. But federal auditors found a 100 percent error rate in entries from one-third of the 102 schools providing information. As a result, BIA must keep paying millions to contractor Applied Management Engineering Inc. to ensure that information within the system reflects accurate and complete data on the condition of school facilities.

BIA officials expect to spend about \$1.7 million annually through fiscal 2006 on contractor costs to operate the building information system, in addition to \$250,000 for in-house expenses. The bureau hopes to cut its annual vendor costs to \$750,000 in fiscal 2007 while keeping in-house costs at their current level.

The system originally cost \$12.5 million from 1995 through 2002 to develop and set up. Another \$13 million was needed, however, from 1999 to this year for a contract with Applied Management to cover validation of the buildings' inventory and condition data.

In February Applied Management completed its validation of inventory data and backlog that existed in the old system. The bureau plans to complete the transfer of corrected data to the new system by August. Issues such as software compatibility problems have delayed entry of some data for more than a year. Federal auditors said the bad data hasn't delayed maintenance project schedules or resulted in unsafe learning environments, but they added that BIA must fix its technology problems.

The report recommends that the agency establish better guidance and performance expectations for employees who are responsible for entering and reviewing data. It also recommends that bureau officials analyze errors to identify training needs for its employees.

Aurene Martin, acting assistant secretary for Indian affairs, said the bureau is forming a group to develop, among other things, performance criteria and more comprehensive user manuals. The group will also more clearly define roles and responsibilities of employees who work on the facilities data system. And a new "Quality Assurance" position will be created to provide oversight for field data collection, input and maintenance. The job also includes analyzing data accuracy and completeness to identify problems and trends.

The study noted several capabilities of the building data system that could benefit the schools. Designed as an easy-to-use application, the new system lets school managers enter data without memorizing lengthy codes and helps BIA officials make consistent decisions for disbursing funds and prioritizing repair projects.