



Associated Press

Edward V. Regan, the State Comptroller, placing telephone books to stand on before his news conference yesterday in Albany. Mr. Regan felt that he was not able to be seen behind the microphones, and used the books for elevation.

**By JOSH BARBANEL**

New York State auditors are investigating widespread abuses of state automobiles and state-issued credit cards, State Comptroller Edward V. Regan said yesterday.

He said that some of the 30,000 state credit cards were being used to purchase gasoline for personal vehicles, and others to buy cigarettes and other personal items.

While the extent of the abuses is not known, Mr. Regan said, a sampling of transactions in 10 agencies had turned up "dozens and dozens of examples."

He estimated that the abuses could cost the state up to \$1 million.

He said that some cases would probably be turned over for criminal prosecution and that there was evidence of "fraudulent collusion" and kickbacks by operators of filling stations.

"The patterns of abuse are widespread throughout the state and throughout the major departments," he said. "It is very, very serious."

Mark C. Lawton, the State Budget Director, said that the issue of the state credit cards had been under study for the last two years and that new systems were being developed to reduce the possibility of fraud.

Other state officials said that, while the problem was serious, they doubted Mr. Regan's estimate of the cost.

"Any money at all is a serious matter," said James E. Introne, Director of State Operations. "But I don't think we are talking in terms of megabucks."

The credit cards are issued for each of about 30,000 state-owned cars and trucks and can be used at state pumps and many private gasoline stations for gasoline, oil and minor repairs up to a maximum of \$75. They are issued by the Office of General Services, but administered by each state agency.

In some cases, state employees used credit cards to purchase more gasoline

than the car tank could hold or more supplies than a single vehicle could use, Mr. Regan said. Auditors also reported that credit cards for vehicles no longer in state service had been used and that the state had no method for invalidating the use of lost or stolen cards.

Mr. Regan also said that a "significant number" of state employees were using some of the state's 6,000 passenger cars for nonstate business, including driving to work. In addition, he said, cars had been assigned to employees and students who were not licensed drivers.

Last month, a plumber at the Brooklyn Developmental Center was ar-

raigned on charges of defrauding the state of more than \$100,000 through credit-card purchases of gasoline over a 14-month period, according to a spokesman for Attorney General Robert Abrams. The plumber, Charles Wade, was arrested in Virginia on a fugitive warrant, following a 39-count indictment charging more than 1,000 unauthorized transactions, including the purchase of more than 400 gallons of gasoline in one day.

The audit, covering the period from April 1980 to December 1981, was begun

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