

# State study says SIDC mishandled use of vehicles

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Clients of the Staten Island Developmental Center (SIDC) were sometimes transported by unlicensed drivers last year because of the facility's laxity in monitoring its staff members' driving records, according to a study released yesterday.

An audit by state Comptroller Edward Regan focusing on transportation services at six developmental centers in the metropolitan area also accused the SIDC of overstaffing and poor maintenance of its vehicles.

"Any accident or mishap stemming from this situation would be completely avoidable," Regan said in a statement accompanying the report. "It is the job of these audits and my office to see to it that necessary changes are made."

The report released yesterday criticized all six developmental centers operated by the state Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) in the metropolitan area for their failure to monitor the driving records of staff members.

SIDC director James Walsh was unavailable for comment yesterday. But the OMRDD was given a draft of the audit last year and responded with a number of guidelines for developmental centers' monitoring of driving records. The office also claims to have taken steps to reduce staffing and implement better maintenance procedures.

"Overall, the audit did not find a substantial number of faults," said Louis Ganim, an OMRDD spokesman. "It didn't find any serious situations."

However, the report released yesterday faulted OMRDD's response to the audit's recommendations, saying that the agency had made it voluntary for developmental centers to take advantage of a state Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) program

that provides immediate notification of staff members' violations.

In examples of poor monitoring of drivers' records, the report cited an SIDC bus operator who had his license suspended in January 1984 for speeding but continued to transport clients until the center learned of the suspension six months later.

Investigators observed another SIDC driver operating a bus despite the suspension of his license for speeding and failure to report an accident in which someone was injured, according to the report.

The report said the poor monitoring stemmed from the failure of the six developmental centers to avail themselves of the DMV's Critical Driver Certification Program, which notifies subscribers of staff members' violations.

According to the report, SIDC also incurred extra costs by allowing vehicles to remain "out of service for unnecessarily long periods of time."

The report says that as of February 1985, two SIDC buses had been out of service for four months, and that buses had to be rented for nine days when another vehicle's wheelchair lift broke. The rental costs totaled \$4,500.

In addition, the audit found that SIDC dropped its number of staff drivers from 36 to 30 during the last seven years, even though the center's population declined by nearly 900 clients during that period.

The report also says that an analysis of 14 drivers on Jan. 23, 1985, found that they were operating vehicles for only 28 of the 104 hours that they were on duty.

"Better scheduling of these drivers could save at least \$24,000 annually," the report concluded.

In its response to the audit, OMRDD said the Staten Island facility had cut its driving staff to 19 and had begun entering the drivers in the DMV's driver certification program.

SIDC also implemented a revised system for tracking and prioritizing vehicle repair orders.