

Cops call new \$15.7 million station unfit

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Cops call new \$15.7 million station unfit

By Ronald Kozioł
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THERE'S JUST one problem with the shiny new \$15.7 million Chicago police station at 727 E. 111th St.: The department refuses to use it.

As a result, the city and Cook County have spent more than \$300,000 since February to maintain a virtually empty building. Four-fifths of the cost is borne by the city.

Police say that as impressive as the building may look, it is unfit for occupancy. Neither the emergency electric generator—a vital piece of equipment during a power failure—nor the air-conditioning works properly.

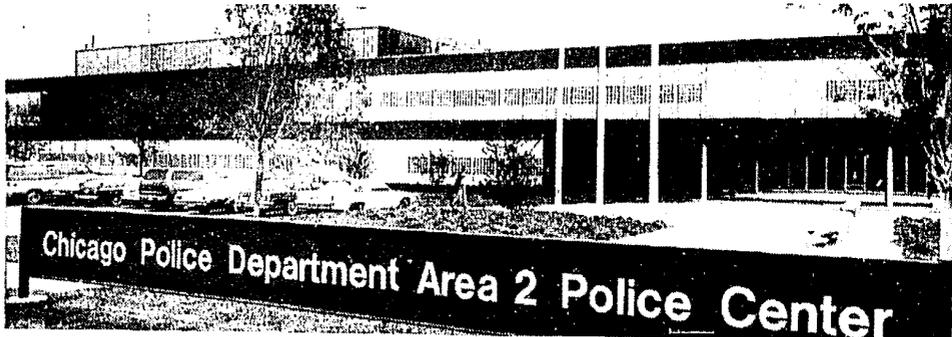
In addition, the building has no soundproofing to protect occupants from the overpowering noise from the second-floor pistol range. Although police spurn the building as a station, some officers drop in to improve their marksmanship on the range.

Problems with the department's elaborate communications system meant that the radio and telephone system was not completed until July 15.

THE BUILDING IS to serve as a district and an area station. Until it can be used, police in that part of the city still work out of two dingy old buildings, Burnside Area headquarters, 9059 S. Cottage Grove Ave., and the Kensington District Station, 200 E. 115th St.

John Hill, a city architect, agrees with the police that the new building still is unfit. He said he hopes the necessary repairs can be made in time for police to move in by late September.

The Cook County Circuit Court system, which has two courtrooms in the build-



Tribune photo by John Dzaukur

The new \$15.7 million Chicago police station at 727 E. 111th St.: Police say the emergency electric generator and the air-conditioning don't work properly and that

there's no soundproofing against noise from the second-floor pistol range. The range and courtrooms are the only parts of the building being used consistently.

ing, is less unhappy than the police. The court portion of the building—occupying only about a fifth of the floor space—has been in use since February.

The police point out that the courts are in operation only in daylight hours Monday through Friday. The police station would always be open.

A VISITOR to the building walks past neatly trimmed grass into an impressive two-story, blue-and-white structure with gleaming walls and polished floors.

The building is completely furnished for its complement of 350 patrol officers and detectives. But the only policemen to be found are those there to protect the place from vandals and warn visitors that the police station is not open yet.

Only the echo of a visitor's footsteps can be heard until the sound of gunfire suddenly roars like thunder through the empty rooms as someone opens fire on the pistol range.

John Crisham, an operating engineer assigned to the building, said extra insulation can block the sound.

Crisham said there is a faulty air conditioner in the west wing, where the detectives will work. He explained that the emergency electric generator turns on when the regular power system fails, but that it frequently continues on when the power comes back on. When that happens, an electrical specialist has to come out and turn off the generator.

GEORGE LOMBARD, president of Lombard Co. of Alsip, which built the station, expressed surprise that problems

have kept the police from using the building.

"I thought the police were already operating out of there," he said.

Lombard gave assurances that his firm will make any corrections the city requires, but he said the city has been slow to complain. He contended that he didn't know about the lack of soundproofing for the pistol range until a reporter told him about it.

Lombard said he learned about the air-conditioning problem about three weeks ago, and a letter from the city complaining about the emergency electric generator arrived only last Monday.

Lombard said he turned the finished

building over to police last Sept. 1 so that the department's special communications system could be installed.

MATT RODRIGUEZ, deputy police superintendent for technical services, confirmed that the communications system, especially the department's internal telephone system, caused a lot of problems.

But he said those problems have been corrected. Rodriguez also said that the department complained about the firing-range noise in February, and about the generator and the air conditioning a little later.

