

Albany wa\$teland

Gov finds millions are squandered

By FREDRIC U. DICKER and BRENDAN SCOTT - NY Post
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ALBANY -- Not that we're surprised!

Aides to Gov. Cuomo revealed yesterday that they found massive waste in state government -- including 1 million square feet of unused state office space in New York City, nearly 2,000 vendors providing often duplicated products and services, and 425 toll-free phone numbers that haven't been used in months.

They discovered that state agencies rented costly new office space as recently as December -- even as the equivalent of a skyscraper's worth of state-owned and state-rented office space stood vacant -- costing taxpayers more than \$30 million a year.

A three-pronged investigation of office rentals, procurement practices, and Internet technology providers turned up dozens of other shocking examples -- from the small to the mega -- of waste, duplication and seemingly inexplicable overpayments.

Through changes being prepared to take effect over the next few months, Cuomo expects to save the state about \$50 million. Over several years, that figure is expected grow to more than \$1 billion.

Cuomo's aides found the state pays IBM \$224 an hour for data-entry personnel working on one project while the state paid another vendor, Keane, \$106.32 an hour for what was described as identical services.

They found a state agency paying \$3.14 per dozen for medium-tip, blue-ink ballpoint pens, while another state agency paid \$8.93 for the exact same product.

"There is no end to the horror stories," said Howard Glaser, Cuomo's director of state operation, who is directing the efficiency probes.

"We buy \$3 billion worth of stuff every year and we are the size of a Walmart," Glaser said. "But we buy like we're 100 different 7-Elevens, and that results in wasting a lot of taxpayer money."

The findings of squandered money will be given to Cuomo's newly created Spending and Government Efficiency Commission (SAGE), which is charged with overhauling and streamlining state agencies for the first time since Gov. Al Smith did it in 1928. Glaser said the state would soon name a "chief procurement officer" responsible for overseeing and coordinating all purchases.

Meanwhile, in another effort to cut costs, Cuomo has unleashed what aides call "SWAT teams" that are seeking to renegotiate existing contracts with some of the state's largest vendors.

The effort is expected to result in \$600 million in savings over the next five years.