

## Denver's \$2 million mistake

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DENVER - A clerical error on a federal grant application cost the city the funding needed to run its program to protect kids from lead poisoning.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, or HUD, did not consider Denver's request for nearly \$2 million in federal grant monies which would have financed Lead Safe Denver. The city is now cobbling together funding from other programs to cover the impact of the mistake.

Lead Safe Denver, a 9-year-old program operated by the Northeast Denver Housing Center, tests low-income children for lead exposure, offers mitigation assistance for lead-contaminated homes and distributes information on lead poisoning to needy families.

HUD never saw the city's application because a city staffer used an incorrect DUNS number, a number used by federal agencies to track recipients of federal dollars.

"We need to make sure that money goes to people who are who they say they are," said Dr. Warren Friedman, senior advisor to HUD's lead office.

The head of Denver's Housing and Neighborhood Development Office, Terry Ware, described the feeling when he became aware of the \$2 million mistake.

"I can't say it on TV," Ware told 9NEWS. "That 'oh wow' moment. This is bad news."

"We feel pretty bad about it," Ware said. "It shouldn't have happened, but it did."

Ware said the city has identified \$360,000 in federal grants earmarked for other city programs that will be used to keep Lead Safe Denver alive for another year.

At that time, Ware said, the program will be eligible to apply for another federal grant.

Even without the clerical error, there was no guarantee the program would have received funds, however, it had received three previous three-year grants before missing out this year.

Lead Safe Denver has worked extensively in Denver's Five Points Neighborhood, which is represented by City Councilwoman Carla Madison.

"They're a great non-profit that helps the community quite a bit," said Madison. "I'm glad they were able to sort through the pots of money and make it all come together."

Ware indicated the clerical error was made by a "pretty well-seasoned" city employee. "Staff shifts" have occurred since, according to Ware, along with procedural changes designed to reduce similar human errors in the grant application process.

"You have to check, check, check again," said Ware.

The non-profit which operates Lead Safe Denver, the Northeast Denver Housing Center, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

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