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City of New Orleans responds to MWH chairman's comments

By David Hammer, The Times-Picayune

April 22, 2010, 9:16AM

Yesterday, the chairman of MWH, the company paid by the city to manage more than 600 recovery projects, **addressed concerns about his company's performance and billing.**

Robert Uhler, MWH chairman and chief executive officer, put much of the blame for slow projects on the city's bureaucracy.

Here is an e-mail response to those statements from Mayor Ray Nagin's spokesman, James Ross:

"It is accurate that the City has many bureaucratic steps to comply with state and federal regulations. Charter mandates, reporting mandates by the City Council, internal policies and procedures and coordination among myriad processes make doing business in the City very different from the private sector. The City has done its best to streamline the myriad processes and procedures through such means as the Electronic Contract Routing System and the Project Delivery Unit, but it is still a lengthy process."

Uhler also said yesterday that former Capital Projects Administrator Bill Chrisman told MWH staff to stop speaking with members of the City Council who sought information about the projects. Chrisman, who says he was fired in early March for bringing MWH billing issues to light, said he was only passing along a directive that came directly from Mayor Ray Nagin and his top staff.

And here is Ross' response:

"Even though MWH as a contractor reports to the City Administration and not the City Council, no such directive was given by any current staff members or the Mayor's Office. As he no longer is employed here, the City is not in a position to confirm from Mr. Chrisman whether or not he gave such a directive. Bill Chrisman was a senior staff member and acted in his role as director of Capital Projects Administration. While the City is unaware of such a directive, it is possible that he directed MWH on the subject."

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