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City looking to buy 'blast resistant' trash cans to guard against terrorism

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Last Modified: Mar 1, 2012 06:33AM

Chicago is looking to purchase “blast resistant” trash containers to “eliminate or significantly reduce fatalities, injuries and structural failures” in the event of “terrorist bombs.”

New York City routinely removes its downtown garbage cans during the New Year’s Eve celebration in Times Square and other major events that have the potential to become terrorist targets.

But, it looks like Chicago has other plans as it prepares to play host to President Barack Obama and other world leaders during the NATO and G-8 Summits May 19 to 21 at McCormick Place.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s administration has issued a so-called “request for quotations” from companies interested in providing roughly 56 “blast resistant trash receptacles that would protect people, facilities and assets from various explosion effects.”

At the request of the city’s Office of Emergency Management and Communications, the document specifically states, “Bomb mitigation requirements are increasing to protect people, facilities and assets from various explosion aftermath, including fireballs, energy overpressure and fragmentation all of which will likely result from terrorist bombs.”

The office’s executive director, Gary Schenkel, could not be reached for comment.

The solicitation states that the office requires the new trash receptacles to mitigate the threat of: “primary fragmentation from materials in contact with the charge; secondary fragments from near the charge and pieces of trash receptacles should it fail and blast overpressure” and fireballs.

Interested contractors were advised that “explosive tests shall be conducted” and that “pre- and post-detonation photos along with video footage” must be submitted to the city along with their bids.

“Receptacles must have the capacity to contain and mitigate six pounds of pure TNT placed inside the receptacle,” the document states.

Deputy mayoral press secretary Jennifer Hoyle said the new trash containers would be located in “high-risk areas.” But, she played down the purchase by saying, “This is a replacement contract. We already have these.”

In March, 2011, then-Mayor Richard M. Daley’s administration awarded a \$2.5 million contract to Massachusetts-based Big Belly Solar to provide at least 400 solar powered trash compactors in the central business district where pedestrian traffic is heaviest and trash bins need frequent pickups.

More recently, the Emanuel administration has talked about selling the rights to advertise on those downtown trash compactors to generate the \$25 million in revenues from “municipal marketing” and sponsorship deals built into the mayor’s 2012 budget.

Much of the anxiety associated with hosting the back-to-back summits has centered around the international onslaught of protesters, the cost of containing them and the damage that may be caused by those demonstrations.

But, the impending purchase of blast resistant trash containers underscores the fact that an act of terrorism during the summits is a far greater threat.

The Chicago Sun-Times reported last month that Chicago Police officers facing off against protesters during the summits would be equipped with new face shields that fit comfortably over gas masks and include an air-tight seal to prevent officers from being blinded by liquids thrown at them.

The \$193,461 emergency contract with Colorado-based Super Seer Corp. for the purchase of 3,057 shields marked the first use of the power granted to Emanuel to purchase goods and services for the summits — without City Council approval or competitive bidding — provided those items cannot be purchased under existing contracts.

The newspaper also reported that the city was soliciting bids for “riot gear and training aids” for the 30 horses in the Police Department’s Mounted Unit expected to play a key role in controlling crowds during the summits.

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