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Feds might take Tacoma's police grant money back

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By KATE MARTIN — Staff writer

The city of Tacoma might have to pay back \$174,000 of a federal grant it received to hire police officers.

The Washington State Auditor's Office reported Monday that the city did not spend the federal money correctly.

In 2009, the city received nearly \$1.6 million from the U.S. Department of Justice to pay for five police officers over three years. After it took a while for the city to hire new officers, the city asked Justice to extend the grant period, said Susan Ramirez, Tacoma assistant finance director and controller.

"Everyone that reviewed it thought it was a one-year extension to the 36 months," she said Monday.

But the extension allowed the city to seek reimbursement beyond the initial three-year grant period, not to use federal funds on a single position for more than 36 months, according to the state auditor's report.

In addition, the Auditor's Office found the city did not file timely reports for another grant, called the Cops Hiring Program. The nearly \$5 million award, received last year, allowed the city to stave off layoffs in the midst of a budget crunch.

Ramirez said the city expects the U.S. Department of Justice to decide within three months whether Tacoma must pay back the \$174,000.

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