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**Edgar on spot at trial;**

**Staff sought MSI details**

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SPRINGFIELD-Gov. Edgar acknowledged for the first time Wednesday that his staff had asked for and obtained information from the State Police about an ongoing criminal investigation of Management Services of Illinois.

That quest for internal information about the probe ultimately strained relations between the governor's chief legal counsel and State Police investigators, Edgar said in taped testimony played during the federal corruption trial of Deputy Public Aid Director James Berger.

Defense attorney Ronald Stone asked Edgar, a defense witness, whether he was aware that the State Police "basically chastised your chief counsel for asking about the status of the investigation."

Edgar replied, "There was tension in that regard."

The governor went on to say the information his office was seeking was relevant only from "a policy point of view." And his aides later said no sensitive information was given to the governor's office.

"There are policy things we would like to look at, and have reasons to try to find out why would a contract like this be issued, who was involved in it, not from a criminal point of view but just from a policy point of view," Edgar said.

That revelation about the MSI case, contained in testimony videotaped two weeks ago and played for jurors on Wednesday, prompted questions from a prominent government watchdog group.

"It raises very, very troubling questions of ethics, of independence, of whose fingerprints are on this and how objective this investigation was before it got into the hands of the U.S. attorney's office," said Jim Howard, executive director of Illinois Common Cause.

Prosecutors accuse Berger of playing a central role in renegotiating an MSI contract with Public Aid that led to at least $ 7.1 million in improper payments to the firm, which was one of Edgar's top campaign donors. Edgar has not been accused of wrongdoing.

On tape, Edgar also:

-Contradicted his testimony last summer, when he said he had two meetings with MSI officials before 1994. On Wednesday, he could recall only a May, 1994, dinner meeting.

-Continued to insist political favoritism is not a factor in how state contracts are awarded and said he would be "extremely shocked" if that actually had occurred in his administration.

-Did not know that the State Police apparently had a copy of an anonymous letter alleging wrongdoing by MSI before his office turned over a copy of it to the agency in May, 1995.

Edgar's testimony was the second time since July that he had appeared as a witness in an MSI-related trial.

His lawyers fought unsuccessfully Wednesday to keep the tape from being released to the public.

Edgar's top aide downplayed the governor's confirmation of friction between the State Police and the administration's top lawyer, and denied that any sensitive information about the probe had been funneled improperly to the governor's staff. The State Police and FBI have overseen the probe.

"During the investigation, Director Gainer would inform our office as to the status of what he believed was appropriate for us to know," Edgar chief of staff Eugene Reineke said.

Late Wednesday, State Police Director Terrance Gainer declined to comment on the governor's testimony.

It was unclear from Edgar's testimony when the administration sought the information and what information was sought.