

Jeffco expenses total \$1.1 million, so far

By Kieran Nicholson
Denver Post
June 24

JEFFERSON COUNTY –

In just two months, Jefferson County has spent more than \$1 million on the Columbine High School tragedy and the total is climbing.

The figure includes 30,400 hours in paid time - including overtime - logged by the sheriff's office, the county coroner and other county employees from various departments, County Administrator Ron Holliday told commissioners Wednesday.

"At this point it has strained everybody," Holliday said.

The county spent about \$1.1 million on Columbine expenditures - 89 percent of it on salaries. Of that, about \$800,000 went to the sheriff's department and more than half of that was for overtime.

The hours logged, from April 20 through May 31, equal 18 full-time positions working for a full year, said Holliday.

The dollar figure and hours do not include the district attorney's office or the county's health department or library.

The DA's investigation of the shootings, like the sheriff's investigation, could take years.

"Those numbers will be significant," Holliday said. A \$100,000 phone bill to the county is being absorbed by US West. The bulk of the billing stemmed from setting up temporary phone lines at a makeshift media headquarters at the Columbine Library to deal with the crush of press calls to the county from around the world. "Our US West charges are going to be minimal," he said. Shortly after gunfire rang out April 20, hundreds of county employees, as well as employees from surrounding cities, "dropped what they were doing to help," Holliday said. Holliday said it may be impossible to figure out the exact fiscal cost in dealing with the tragedy. As employees chipped in to shoulder the burden, the effort put a strain on the county's day-to-day business, he said.

And although the county was able to keep up with essential services, "The stress, the effort, the fatigue, the work backlog - all have taken their toll," he said. If needed, the county eventually will be able to tap into reserves to cover fiscal overrides associated with the response.

"There is money in the bank to back this up," Holliday said. Meanwhile, officials are seeking assistance from federal, state and private sources to help trim the costs. A pledge of \$1.5 million from the U.S. Justice Department should be available early next week, but it is earmarked for school security measures.