



US 'steals' medical supplies amid pandemic: Expert

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April 10, 2020

The U.S. government is 'stealing medical supplies' amid coronavirus pandemic, which is 'abusive' from a civil liberties perspective, said a policy expert at U.S.-based think tank Cato Institute.

"Is the Federal Government Stealing Medical Supplies?" asked Chris Edwards, the director of tax policy studies at Cato and editor of www.DownsizingGovernment.org, on his latest blog for the institute.

"That appears to be the case," he answered his own question.

"The Los Angeles Times calls it 'seizing', but it amounts to the same thing as these are legal products that the government did not order. The White House and FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] are swooping in to grab masks, thermometers, and other items in a secretive process with apparently little recourse," Edwards wrote.

Stealing allegations came at a time when U.S. authorities are accused of confiscating much-needed medical supplies en route to other countries, either by overpaying in the last minute at the airports before shipments or stopping cargo ships leaving the U.S.

On Wednesday, Alden McLaughlin, the premier of Cayman Islands, said it is a "huge disappointment" to see the U.S. removing eight ventilators, 50,000 masks and other medical supplies from a ship destined for the overseas British territory in the western Caribbean.

A day later, he announced on Twitter that the "US have released the shipment that contains the ventilators and other essential items that we'd ordered" and thanked the U.S. ambassador to Jamaica for his efforts to "make this happen."

Last week, Germany and France slammed the U.S. after it allegedly seized millions of masks set to be shipped to the European nations amid the coronavirus crisis.

Berlin's Interior Minister Andreas Geisel went even further and called it "modern day piracy."

"We consider that an act of modern piracy," he said, adding: "You don't treat your transatlantic partners like that," he is further quoted as saying in *The Financial Times*.

The masks, made by the U.S. corporation 3M in its factory in Shanghai, China, were intercepted at Thailand's Bangkok Airport and instead went to the U.S.

For Cato's Edwards, central planning is the wrong way to go for disaster planning and response.

"These actions are abusive from a civil liberties perspective, and such command-and-control methods make no practical sense either," he said.

"Decentralization is crucial in disaster response. White House theft of medical supplies and attempted central planning during the Covid-19 crisis are the wrong ways to go," Edwards said on a separate Twitter message.

Data compiled by the U.S.-based Johns Hopkins University shows that worldwide coronavirus infections have exceeded 1.61 million, with the death toll surpassing 96,700, mostly in Europe and the U.S.