

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC



## Arizona police gauge Obama's military-surplus decision

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President Barack Obama on Monday significantly reduced the stream of the military-style inventory offered to municipal police agencies, prohibiting transfers of weaponized vehicles and aircraft and banning items such as grenade launchers, bayonets and high-caliber firearms.

Limiting law enforcement's acquisition of some of the more conspicuous gear is part of a broader effort to stem the militarization of municipal forces that could "alienate and intimidate local residents and may send the wrong message," Obama said Monday in a speech in Camden, N.J.

But despite the popularity of these programs in some of Arizona's agencies, some police representatives say the changes will have little effect on their day-to-day operations.

Monday's announcement was hailed by critics of militarized local police forces, but questioned by those who say the action will only punish [small forces who cannot afford to purchase](#) similar items from private vendors.

At least 21 Arizona agencies already have 32 banned or weapon-restricted items, according to data provided by *USA TODAY* and by Payson police Detective Matt Van Camp, who oversees the Pentagon's "1033 program" for the state.

But the newly restricted items represent a fraction of the program in Arizona. According to records gathered April 21, Arizona agencies were in possession of nearly 4,500 items, worth a total of \$46.7 million.

Van Camp said it remains unclear how the individual agencies will be required to deal with the banned items already issued. Monday's rules note the government is working to identify police agencies in possession of the now-restricted equipment, and whether a recall would be possible.

Monday isn't the first time the reins of military-surplus programs have been tightened on an Arizona agency.

In September, the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office was terminated from the 1033 program after failing to locate nine missing weapons. The agency was required to return its cache of issued firearms, helicopters and other gear within 120 days. Records show the Sheriff's Office is not currently in possession of any 1033 gear.

Tim Gaffney, director of administration at the Pinal County Sheriff's Office, said the agency primarily uses the program to acquire surplus office equipment, tools and search-and-rescue equipment. The changes, he said, will have no effect on operations.

"None of our aircraft or our MRAP (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles) have ever been weaponized while in our possession, nor are there any plans to ever weaponize them," he said.

Bayonets were the only item now on the prohibited list to ever be acquired by the Sheriff's Office, he said. They were at one time used by rescue teams for digging and cutting barbed wire, but they were returned a year ago.

Tim Lynch, CATO Institute's director for the Project on Criminal Justice, said Obama's speech was a promising first step. "From our point of view, just the president drawing more attention to this issue of militarization and the weaponry that is flowing from the Pentagon to local police departments is a good development," he said.

Lynch said the move returns policy decisions to local municipalities, where they belong. "When a chief can bypass local checks and balances about acquiring these extraordinary weapons, you're cutting the local political process out of the loop," he said.

Monday's ban does not prohibit departments from buying military-style gear directly from private vendors.

The Yavapai County Sheriff's Office months ago voluntarily returned some of their equipment — all of the rifles previously obtained through the program, according to Dwight D'Evelyn, a spokesman for the agency. D'Evelyn said sheriff's administrators made the decision in anticipation of such presidential action.

"We will utilize existing supplies and outside sources for additional armament as needed," he said. "(The sheriff) declined further involvement due in part to the red tape and reporting requirements necessitated by the program."

D'Evelyn said the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office's current wheel-based vehicle is not weaponized and is used for only "high-risk" incidents.

The sheriff, D'Evelyn said, recognizes the issues with public perception that stem from the "weaponization" of certain vehicles, but said this must be balanced with providing safety to deputies.

"Many of the vehicles agencies can purchase through private vendors already look very much like the military surplus vehicles supplied in the program – but for smaller agencies the cost was prohibitive," he said.

"In this respect, the Sheriff believes the program was helpful to those agencies who could not afford an armored vehicle otherwise."