



Police Departments Suspended for Losing Pentagon Equipment

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Nearly 200 state and local police departments have been suspended from a Pentagon program that allows local agencies to procure surplus military equipment after it was learned the weapons and equipment could not be accounted for, **according to Fusion.net**.

Among the cache of items missing from the 184 agencies are M14 and M16 rifles, .45-caliber pistols, shotguns and two missing Humvees.

"We don't know where these weapons are going, whether they are really lost, or whether there is corruption involved," Tim Lynch, director of the CATO Institute's project on criminal justice, told Fusion.net.

"The case for giving military weaponry to these small police departments was already thin in the beginning," he said. "Now that we're finding that there is insufficient accountability for tracking this equipment, then the case is beginning to fall apart."

The issue of militarizing local police has become a subject of debate since riots broke out in Ferguson, Missouri, following the fatal shooting of a black teenager by a white police officer on Aug. 9. According to the Pentagon, Ferguson police have received three vehicles and a generator under the program, **The Huffington Post** reported.

The Pentagon program began with the 101st Congress in 1990 during a time of "a bloated military and what [Congress] perceived as a worsening drug crisis," according to **Newsweek**. With the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act, the defense secretary was authorized to transfer to federal and state agencies "personal property" of the Defense Department, things like small arms and ammunition.

It has grown to larger items, such as Humvees and mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles.

In Mississippi, there are at least a dozen missing M-14s, according to Fusion. The Huntington Beach, California, police were suspended from the program in 2013 for losing an M-16 assault rifle as was the Stockton, California, Police Department, which lost two of them. The Sutter County Sheriff's Office was suspended after reporting a missing M-14 and M-15.

Despite the suspensions for losing track of weapons, Fusion reported that the Pentagon has said no agency has been suspended for "use or operation of the allocated firearms."

Typically, when an agency is suspended, the Pentagon allows it to keep the weapons it was already given but it does not receive any new items, Fusion reported. A Georgia police department that was twice reprimanded for separate cases of missing .45-caliber pistols led to being terminated from the program altogether.

Departments are required to do an annual inventory of their supply. A "program compliance review" is also performed bi-annually to document "records, property, and usage" of military-issued equipment, a Pentagon official told Fusion.

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has the authority to suspend the program, though Pentagon spokesman Rear Adm. John Kirby told **The Hill** that there has been no move toward doing so.

"The secretary has the authority to rescind and take back equipment that is transferred to local law enforcement agencies if he deems fit. He has that authority," Kirby said.

Hagel has asked for additional information so that he can look into it, though Kirby stressed that there is no "formal review" underway.