



MCSO missing nine weapons from Pentagon's 1033 program

By Megan Cassidy
August 26, 2014

Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio admitted Tuesday that his department is currently missing nine firearms issued to the agency through a federal program that hands out surplus military gear to local law-enforcement.

Arpaio's is one of 184 state and local police agencies that has reportedly been suspended from the Pentagon's controversial 1033 program for losing weapons or failing to comply with other stipulations, a recent Fusion article reported.

The report is one of the latest in an ongoing debate about the 1033 program and the merits of outfitting local police for a warzone.

Arpaio said the agency picked up about 200 weapons from the surplus program shortly after he was elected in 1993, and 20 to 22 vanished over the years. Through internal audits, the office was able to recover about half of the firearms, typically from retired or current deputies who had brought them home.

The current arsenal that the Sheriff's Office amassed from the 1033 program includes a Hummer, a tank, 90 M-16 rifles, 116 .45-caliber pistols, 34 M-14 rifles and three helicopters. It is short eight .45-caliber pistols and one M-16 rifle.

The missing artillery triggered the 2012 suspension, Arpaio said, meaning the agency can keep the supplies they have but can't collect more.

Lt. Brandon Jones, a Sheriff's Office spokesman, attributed the missing equipment to unsophisticated computers and tracking devices that existed when many of the weapons were issued two decades ago.

Arpaio downplayed the blow: His agency can now afford their own firepower. The agency purchased 400 Smith and Wesson AR-15s using anti-racketeering funds last year. A 50-caliber machine gun was also purchased with confiscated drug money, he said.

"I think we were [suspended] a couple of years ago, but we don't care," Arpaio said. "We got our own."

Jones said the agency is actively looking for the missing firearms and has criminal reports out for all that are lost.

The Maricopa County Sheriff's Office was the only Arizona agency named in the Fusion report. An Arizona Republic investigation highlighted potential violations of the program by the Pinal County but it was not immediately clear whether the agency was ever suspended.

There are generally no restrictions on what type of weaponry state and local agencies can purchase. Hurdles typically come from the seller restraints and price tags, said Walter Olson, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's Center for Constitutional Studies.

"Very few of them would have a tank if they had to pay for it themselves," he said. "That's why it's the federal subsidy programs that drive so much of this."

The American Civil Liberties Union recently issued a scathing report about the excessive militarization of local law enforcement.

While supporters say automatic weapons are issued to combat equally armed suspects, the ACLU and other critics say police endanger communities by carrying out basic police work armed with military weaponry.

Alessandra Soler, executive director of ACLU of Arizona, said it wasn't surprising that some of these weapons would turn up missing.

"There has been very little public oversight over the scope of federal funding, and very little is known about the program itself," she said. "The public should be concerned about how these weapons are used."