



CRS Report for Congress

Defense Surplus Equipment Disposal: Background Information

Valerie Bailey Grasso
Specialist in Defense Acquisition Policy
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

The Department of Defense (DOD) through a Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) component called the Defense Utilization and Marketing Service (DRMS) has a policy for disposing of government equipment and supplies considered surplus or deemed unnecessary to the agency's currently designated mission. DRMS is charged with responsibility for property reuse (including resale), precious metal recovery, recycling, hazardous property disposal, and the demilitarization of military equipment. The effort to dispose of surplus military equipment dates back to the end of World War II when the Federal government sought to reduce a massive inventory of surplus military equipment by making such equipment available to civilians.¹ DRMS was established in 1972. Twila Gonzales was appointed DRMS Director on March 17, 2008. Formerly she served as the Deputy Commander of the Defense Distribution Center in New Cumberland, PA. This report will be updated as events warrant.

On September 12, 1972, the Defense Property Disposal Service (the forerunner to DRMS) was established under the Defense Supply Agency (now DLA). Defense Property Disposal Offices were established worldwide on or near major military installations. DRMS is charged with responsibility for property reuse (including the disposal and sale of surplus and excess defense equipment and supplies), precious metal recovery, recycling, hazardous property disposal, and the demilitarization of military equipment. Headquartered in Battle Creek, Michigan, DRMS employs about 1,500 military and civilian personnel. With offices in 39 states, two U.S. territories and 14 countries (including Iraq and Afghanistan), DRMS provides support at major U.S. military installations worldwide.

¹ Disposal of surplus real property, including land, buildings, commercial facilities, and equipment situated thereon, is assigned to the General Services Administration's Office of Property Disposal. For further information, see CRS Report RS20630, *Surplus Federal Property*, by Stephanie Smith.

Property disposal means redistributing, transferring, donating, selling, demilitarizing, destroying, or other “end of life cycle” activities. Disposal is the final stage before the property leaves DOD’s control.² In some cases, the act of demilitarization — destroying the item’s military offensive and defensive capability — accomplishes the intent of disposal. During FY2006 DLA identified, disposed of, or re-utilized approximately \$20 billion dollars of military surplus/excess materiel — items ranging from desks and chairs to full weapons systems.³

Property is considered excess when one particular agency determines it is not needed for its particular use, while property is considered surplus when it is no longer needed by the Federal government. Property transferred to DRMS is declared surplus after about 21 days. Surplus property can be reused, transferred, donated, or sold; potential recipients may include law enforcement agencies, school systems, medical institutions, civic and community organizations, libraries, homeless assistance providers, state and local government agencies, and the public. About half of all surplus items are designated for the foreign military sales program, and about half are made available to other government agencies, eligible donees, or sold to the public.⁴

In June 2001, DRMS awarded a seven-year contract to Surplus Acquisition Venture, LLC, for the exclusive right to sell military surplus items. The company established Government Liquidation, LLC as the purchaser and reseller for aircraft parts, vehicles, clothing and textiles, medical items, furniture, commercial kitchen equipment, and other items. Government Liquidation is a subsidiary of Liquidity Services, Inc. (LSI), and holds the exclusive contract with DRMS for the sale of surplus DOD property. LSI has established new “centralized controlled property centers” in the U.S. to achieve greater control over inventory - to prevent restricted property from being offered for sale to the public.⁵ As of June 1, 2007, LSI’s contract with DOD was broadened to include the oversight, audit, and verification procedures for the destruction of DOD scrap property sold to the public. Under the terms of the contract, LSI will manage the receipt, marketing, and sale of virtually all DOD surplus scrap property in Hawaii and Guam.

In 2005, DLA conducted a public-private competition for warehousing functions at 68 DRMS sites in the United States, including Hawaii. As a result of cost-comparison,

² See the Acquisition Community Connection at the Defense Acquisition University, at [<https://acc.dau.mil>].

³ From the DRMS website, at [<http://www.drms.dla.mil>].

⁴ For further discussion of excess defense property, and the demilitarization and disposal of surplus military equipment, see CRS Report RL31675, *Arms Sales: Congressional Review Process* and CRS Report RS20428, *Excess Defense Articles: Grants and Sales to Allies and Friendly Countries*, both by Richard F. Grimmett, and CRS Report RL31686, *Demilitarization of Significant Military Equipment*, by Valerie Bailey Grasso. Another source for information is the Demilitarization and Disposal section of the Acquisition Community Connection at the Defense Acquisition University.

⁵ Press Release. Liquidity Services, Inc., to Develop and Implement New Inventory Assurance Procedures under Its Surplus Contract with DOD. September 13, 2006. [<http://investor.liquidityservicesinc.com/phoenix.zhtml?c=195189&p=iro1-newsArticle&ID=904827&highlight=>]

DRMS determined that it was more cost effective to retain the government employees rather than convert to contractor performance. The final decision, to retain the government's Most Efficient Organization (MEO), was announced on October 7, 2005.⁶

Controlling Legal Authority

Authority for the disposal of surplus defense property can be found in Public Law (P.L.) 94-519, 10 U.S.C. 381, which amends the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949 (40 U.S.C. 484), P.L. 107-117, and in DOD Manual 4160.21, at [<http://www.dla.mil/dlaps/dod/416021m/guide.asp>].

Legislative Activity

In the 110th Congress two new bills could strengthen the control of sensitive surplus military equipment. S. 387, the Stop Arming Iran Act, was introduced on January 25, 2007, has two co-sponsors, and was referred to the Senate Armed Services Committee. The bill would prohibit the direct or indirect sale of spare parts for F-14 fighter aircraft (whether for sale through DRMS or through another DOD agency). A similar bill, H.R. 1441, also known as the Stop Arming Iran Act, was introduced on June 12, 2007, has 38 co-sponsors, and was referred to the House Armed Services

Major Recipients

State and Local Governments. If property cannot be reused or transferred to other federal agencies, it may be donated to state and local government programs. Each state has designated a "State Agency for Surplus Property Program," which is a local governing authority to receive and distribute all federal surplus property. The program authorizes "screeners" to handle the logistics, and the state agency may charge a fee for handling the transaction. Eligible recipients include, but are not limited to organizations that promote public health, safety, education, recreation, conservation, and other public needs, including veterans groups and Native American organizations. Some groups that qualify as a "service education activity" may have a slight priority in the screening process.

Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO). LESO administers 10 U.S.C. Section 2576a, which transfers excess DOD equipment to federal and state law enforcement agencies through the 1033 Program (FY1997 National Defense Authorization Act). DLA estimates the LESO budget for FY2008 and FY2009 to be \$1.3 million for each year.⁷ In addition, the 1122 Program (FY1994 National Defense Authorization Act) authorizes state and local governments to purchase law enforcement equipment for counter-drug activities. Each state appoints a "Point of Contact (POC)" for this program; the POC may purchase items from any of the four inventory control

⁶ Defense Logistics Agency Announces DRMS A-76 Results. October 7, 2005. [http://www.dla.mil/DLAPublic/DLA_Media_Center/PressRelease/PressRelease.aspx?ID=17]

⁷ Defense Logistics Agency, Operation and Maintenance, Defense-Wide, FY2008/FY2009 Budget Estimates.

points managed by DLA. To order items, applicants are to contact their State Agency for Surplus Property Program.

Fire-Fighting Support Program. Title 10 U.S.C. 2576b authorizes the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service to manage the DOD firefighting property transfers. An interagency agreement between DOD and the Forest Service is under the authority of the Economy Act, 31 U.S.C. 1535. The Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) Program, administered through the Forest Service, provides equipment to state and territorial forestry programs for wildland and rural firefighting.⁸

Humanitarian Assistance Program. 10 U.S.C. 25 authorizes DOD to provide excess property as coordinated through the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, Office of Humanitarian and Refugee Affairs.

Public Sales. Property not reused, transferred, or donated can be sold to the general public through public auctions and sealed bidding. Munitions, explosives and strategic items are not sold.

Other Programs

There are other programs which may assist organizations which fail to qualify for DRMS property as a DOD, federal, or donation customer. Such programs include (but are not limited to) museums, educational institutions, National Guard and Senior Reserve Officer Training Corps units, and the Civil Air Patrol.⁹

For Additional Information

For more information about DRMS, see [<http://www.dla.mil/drms>]. Also, the DLA Customer Interaction Center is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, at (877) 352-2255, or contact the Center at [<http://www.drms.dla.mil/pubaff/html/glance.html>]

⁸ [<http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/partners/fepp/>].

⁹ For further information, see [<http://www.drms.dla.mil/rtd03/specialprograms.htm>].