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In this issue, two reprints are from the federal government. We hope that state and local procurement officers will submit useful state and local publications that we cannot access.

We welcome all suggestions for reprints. Please mail or e-mail your reprint suggestions directly to:

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FEDERAL ACQUISITION: INCREASED ATTENTION TO VEHICLE FLEETS COULD RESULT IN SAVINGS

General Accounting Office*

RESULTS IN BRIEF

The agencies we reviewed cannot ensure that their vehicle fleets are the right size and composition to meet agency missions because of a lack of attention to key fleet management practices. Industry practices for cost-efficient fleets include developing utilization criteria related to the mission of a vehicle and conducting periodic fleet assessments to determine whether fleets are the right size and composition. If unneeded vehicles are identified, they are disposed of. However, policies at the agencies we reviewed do not generally call for clearly defined utilization criteria related to the mission of a vehicle—such as the number of trips per day or hours on station—to ensure that decisions to acquire and retain vehicles are based on a validated need. In addition, most of the agencies do not conduct periodic assessments of their fleets to determine whether they have the right number and type of vehicles. The Navy and the Forest Service do conduct assessments, but either they are done sporadically or the results are not enforced. Some agencies have started to recognize the need to pay more attention to fleet management and are taking steps to revise their guidelines to provide better criteria to determine vehicle needs.

Our work and reviews by inspectors general identified numerous instances where agency fleets included a number of underutilized vehicles. If these vehicles were disposed of, agencies could realize

* Reprinted from the U. S. General Accounting Office. (2004, May). "Federal Acquisition: Increased Attention To Vehicle Fleets Could Result In Savings"(GAO-04-664). Washington, DC: Author. Several modifications are made, including endnotes and exclusion of its Administrator's transmittal memorandum.

savings ranging from thousands to millions of dollars. For example, the Department of the Interior's Inspector General reported that a significant portion of the department's fleet of approximately 36,000 vehicles is underutilized and estimated savings of \$34 million if these vehicles were eliminated from the fleet. Savings can also be realized by changing the composition of the fleet—buying vehicles that are less expensive and less costly to operate and maintain. For example, officials at a Veterans Affairs medical center are replacing 15 passenger vans with less expensive sedans and minivans that will still allow them to meet their community outreach goals.

GSA's Office of Governmentwide Policy and OMB have recently taken a number of actions to require agencies to better manage and improve the cost-efficiency of their fleets. The Office of Governmentwide Policy is currently revising the Federal Management Regulation pertaining to fleet management.² The revised regulation will require agencies to (1) appoint a senior level fleet manager at agency headquarters with the authority for all aspects of fleet management, including control over budget and local decisions; (2) establish utilization criteria and periodically review fleet size; and (3) invest in a fleet management information system. GSA plans to work cooperatively with agencies to help them implement these requirements; however, based on our discussions with agencies outside of GSA, we anticipate strong opposition to the requirement that agencies centralize budget control of the fleets. OMB has recently required agencies, as part of their budget submissions, to report on the size, composition, and cost for their fleets for the current year and to project fleet costs over the subsequent 3-year period.

In this report, we make recommendations to GSA, OMB, and the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs on the need to periodically assess fleet size and composition using utilization criteria related to the mission of a vehicle. In written and oral comments on a draft of this report, the agencies generally concurred with our findings and recommendations.

BACKGROUND

The size and cost of operating the federal vehicle fleet has been a subject of concern for many years. In 1986, Congress enacted legislation

that required agencies, among other things, to collect and analyze the costs of their motor vehicle operations, including acquisition decisions, in order to improve the management and efficiency of their fleets and to reduce costs (Pub. L. No. 99-272). Two years later, we reported that most agencies had not conducted the required studies. In 1992, an interagency task force identified obstacles to cost-efficient fleet management, including the continued lack of compliance with the 1986 legislative requirements, and stated that agencies lacked basic information to effectively and efficiently manage their fleets. In 1994, we reported (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994) among other things, that successful fleet practices included oversight at the headquarters level to ensure that uniform written policies and guidance are provided throughout the organization and fleet management information systems to provide accurate data about the fleet. We also reported that agencies need to conduct periodic reviews to ensure their fleets are the right size and composition.

The vehicle fleets at the agencies we reviewed are widely dispersed. For example, the Army and Navy operate vehicles throughout the world, while the Veterans Affairs fleet is spread across medical centers, national cemeteries, and other locations throughout the country. The approximate number of vehicles operated by the agencies included in our review is shown in Figure 1.

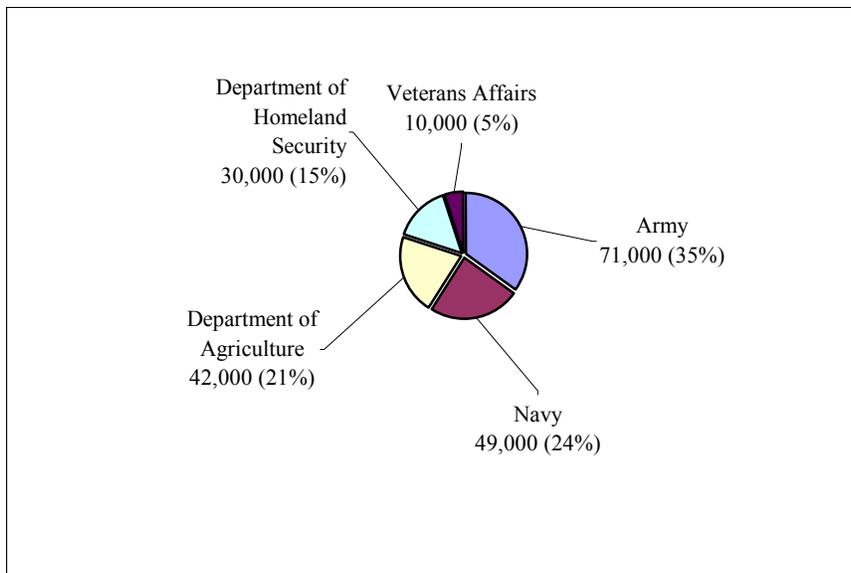
The Office of Governmentwide Policy within GSA develops policies, disseminated through the Federal Management Regulation, and bulletins for agency vehicle fleet management. Federal agencies, however, are responsible for managing their own fleets, including making decisions about the number and type of vehicles they need and how to acquire them.

OGP also collects data from agencies via the Federal Automotive Statistical Tool (FAST) concerning fleet size, composition, and costs. Although GSA uses these data in annual reports to OMB on the government's fleet size and costs, GSA officials told us that much of the data are inaccurate because of the different systems agencies use to collect and report information.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

To determine the extent to which agencies can ensure that their fleets are the right size, we obtained and analyzed agency policies and

FIGURE 1
Approximate Number of Vehicles Operated by the Agencies
Included in our Review



Source: GAO analysis of agency data.

guidelines on fleet management from the Departments of Agriculture, Army, Navy, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs. These agencies, according to GSA data, have some of the largest fleets in the government. Because the Department of Homeland Security was only recently formed, its organizational elements continue to operate their vehicle fleets under the policies of their legacy agencies. Therefore, we limited our review to the department's efforts to leverage its buying power through a strategic sourcing initiative for vehicles and to the steps it is taking to establish departmentwide guidelines on fleet management. Although the Department of the Interior also has a large fleet, we did not include it in our review because the Inspector General recently issued a report on that department's vehicle fleet (Office of Inspector General, 2004). We did not assess agencies' policies on vehicle operation, maintenance or disposal.

To illustrate how local, state and regional officials determine the need for vehicles, we selected local, state and regional offices based on location and number of vehicles within each agency. We obtained and analyzed information and interviewed fleet managers and other officials responsible for fleet management at these locations to identify the controls, oversight, and criteria used to determine the need for vehicles. Following are the locations we contacted or where we conducted our work.

Department of Agriculture	
Natural Resources Conservation Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington, D.C. • State Conservationist Office, Athens, Ga. • Southern Regional Office, Atlanta, Ga. • Texas
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington, D.C. • Wildlife Service, Athens, Ga. • Wildlife Service, Wash. • Veterinary Service, Iowa • Veterinary Services, Conyers, Ga. • Veterinary Service, Eastern Regional Office, Raleigh, N.C.
Forest Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washington, D.C. • Southern Region, Atlanta, Ga. • Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest, Gainesville, Ga. • Daniel Boone National Forest, Ky. • Land Between the Lakes National Recreational Area, Ky. • Pacific Northwest Region, Oreg. • Siuslaw and Willamette National Forests, Oreg.
Department of Home Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of Asset Management, Washington, D.C. • Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, Glynco, Ga. • Customs and Border Protection, Washington, D.C. • Transportation Security Administration, Arlington, Va.
Department of Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Office of the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Transportation Policy), Washington, D.C.
Department of the Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headquarters, Department of the Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, Washington, D.C. • Fort Belvoir, Va. • United States Military Academy, West Point, N.Y. • Fort Carson, Colo.
Department of the Navy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Washington Navy Yard, D.C. • Navy Public Work Center, Washington, D.C. • Navy Public Works Center, Norfolk, Va.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Naval Air Station, Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth, Tex. • Navy Public Works Center, Jacksonville, Fla. • Naval Station Newport, Newport, R.I. • Pacific Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Transportation Equipment Management Center, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii • Atlantic Division, Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Transportation Equipment Management Center, Norfolk, Va.
Department of Veterans Affairs	
Veterans Affairs Health Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headquarters, Washington, D.C. • Medical Center, Bedford, Mass. • Medical Center, Baltimore, Md. • Medical Center, Jamaica Plain, Boston, Mass. • Medical Center, Brockton, Mass.

We reviewed prior GAO and other audit agency reports, reviewed other public documents, and contacted the following offices of inspectors general

- Department of Energy,
- Department of Defense,
- Department of Veterans Affairs,
- Department of Justice,
- Department of Treasury,
- Department of Transportation,
- Department of Homeland Security,
- Department of the Interior, and
- Department of Agriculture.

We also contacted officials from the Naval Audit Service and the Army Audit Agency.

To identify industry standards for efficient fleet management, we discussed the fleet management practices contained in our 1994 report (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994) and the use of utilization criteria with three industry fleet management consultants, one of whom was a contributor to our 1994 report. We selected these consultants based on their experience dealing with the fleet management practices in both the public and private sectors. We also talked with the manager of the Fleet Information Resource Center of the National Association of Fleet Administrators.

FLEET MANAGEMENT ATTENTION IS NEEDED TO ENSURE THAT FLEETS ARE THE RIGHT SIZE AND COMPOSITION

The agencies we reviewed cannot ensure that their vehicle fleets are the right size and composition to meet their missions because of a lack of attention to key fleet management practices. In particular, agencies generally have not established policies with clearly defined utilization criteria related to the mission of a vehicle to ensure that decisions to acquire and retain vehicles are based on a validated need. In addition, agencies have not implemented periodic assessments to determine whether they have the right number and type of vehicles in the fleet. Some agencies have begun to recognize the need to pay more attention to fleet management and are taking steps to review their guidelines in an effort to provide better criteria to determine vehicle needs and to manage their fleets more efficiently.

Agency Policies Do Not Define Mission-Related Utilization Criteria and Fleets Are Not Periodically Assessed

Industry practice for cost-efficient fleets includes establishing policies and procedures that contain clearly defined utilization criteria related to the mission of a vehicle. These criteria are then used to conduct periodic assessments of the fleet to identify underutilized vehicles. As previously noted, our 1994 report highlighted the importance of these fleet management practices. However, as shown in Table 1, most of the agencies we reviewed do not have clearly defined criteria and have not conducted periodic fleet assessments. We did not include DHS in this chart because the agency is still developing most of its fleet management guidelines, policies, and vehicle utilization standards.

The lack of appropriate utilization criteria means that local level officials—who usually make the decisions to acquire and retain vehicles—are not basing their decisions on a validated need. Some agencies establish the number of miles traveled, such as the 12,000 miles per year in GSA’s guidance, as a criterion to measure vehicle utilization. However, this criterion is not appropriate for the mission of some vehicles, such as those used for utility work, medical transportation, or security. Therefore, agency officials often ignore mileage standards. None of the agencies assigned a value to other criteria, such as number of trips per day or hours on station, to measure vehicle use when mileage is not an appropriate measure.

TABLE 1
Extent to Which Agencies' Policies Provide Mission-Related
Utilization Criteria and Agencies Conduct Periodic Fleet
Assessments

	Army	Navy	Forest Service	NRCS	APHIS	VA
Do agency policies provide clearly defined utilization criteria to allow local officials to make decisions on fleet size based on the specific mission of the vehicle?	Some-what	Some-what	No	Some-what	No	No
Does the agency conduct periodic fleet assessments to determine whether all vehicles are needed?	No	Some-what	Some-what	No	No	No

Notes:

- "Yes" indicates that agency policies, procedures, or guidelines specifically and completely address the issue.
- "Somewhat" indicates that the agency policies, procedures, or guidelines address the issue in a general manner.
- "No" indicates that agency policies, procedures, or guidelines do not address the issue.

Source: GAO Analysis.

Following are some examples of cases we found where the application of specific criteria related to the mission of a vehicle would give local fleet managers a more accurate basis on which to make decisions about fleet size:

- At one Veterans Affairs medical center, vehicles are used to transport veterans from their homes to outpatient rehabilitation activities in a metropolitan area outside of Boston. Veterans Affairs officials told us that using only a mileage standard to justify the need for the vehicles is inappropriate because they are used within a confined area. The officials agreed that a better measure would be the number of trips or the number of veterans served.
- The Department of Defense prescribes that the military services establish utilization measures, such as passengers carried or hours

used, to measure the need for a vehicle when mileage is not appropriate. However, neither Army nor Navy guidelines incorporate these types of utilization criteria.

- Natural Resources Conservation Service policy includes only one criterion to establish fleet size, which is a ratio of employees to vehicles. The definition of employees includes full- and part-time employees and volunteers, regardless of roles or job description.

Further, agencies generally do not conduct periodic assessments of their fleets. Decisions about whether to acquire and retain vehicles are made at the local level with little or no headquarters oversight. These local-level decisions are frequently based on the availability of funds rather than on a validated need. For example, directors of Veterans Affairs medical centers and state conservationists at the Natural Resources Conservation Service determine whether or not to acquire vehicles based on the availability of funds. The Army allows local commanders to acquire vehicles with available funds without further justification within established allocation levels. However, these levels have not been reviewed since 1991, 13 years ago.

The Navy and the Forest Service conduct periodic assessments of fleet size, but the results of the assessments are either not enforced or not conducted in a systematic manner. The Navy's Transportation Equipment Management Centers (TEMC)¹ conduct utilization assessments to recommend fleet inventory levels for Navy commands, yet the commands are not required to implement the recommended inventory levels. The Forest Service's guidelines contain instructions for a systematic review of vehicle utilization at local sites, but these reviews are not consistently performed at the locations we visited, and the local sites are not required to report the results of the reviews to agency headquarters.

Some Agencies Are Taking Steps to Improve Fleet Management Practices

Some agencies have begun to focus more attention on fleet management practices that they believe will improve the efficiency of their fleets. At the start of fiscal year 2004, the Army and Navy reorganized to centralize the management of facilities and equipment, including vehicles that are not related to combat forces, at various commands and installations. The Navy established the Naval

Installations Command and the Army established the Installation Management Agency for this purpose. Navy and Army officials told us that these organizations should result in increased attention to fleet management, including the enforcement of the TEMCs's recommended inventory level in the Navy and the revision of outdated vehicle allocation levels in the Army. Officials told us that these organizations will provide more centralized oversight of the Army and Navy vehicle fleets, but individual commands will continue to determine the need for vehicles within the established inventory objectives or allocation levels. At the time of our review, it was too early to determine the impact these reorganizations will have on improving fleet management practices.

In addition, some agencies are reviewing their guidelines in an attempt to include more specific requirements for fleet management. For example, Veterans Affairs officials told us that they are developing a vehicle manual with detailed guidance on how to measure utilization and hope to issue it in the fall of 2004. Department of Defense officials are in the process of revising the department's guidelines and are considering requiring the application of utilization criteria tied to the mission of a vehicle to determine the need for vehicles. In early 2003, DHS established a Fleet Commodity Council to review strategic sourcing issues, including how the department can leverage its purchasing power when acquiring vehicles.

The council, made up of agency fleet managers, meets quarterly. In addition, departmentwide fleet management policies and guidelines are being developed and will include criteria for justifying and assessing vehicle fleet sizes.

OPPORTUNITIES EXIST TO DISPOSE OF UNDERUTILIZED VEHICLES AND REALIZE POTENTIAL SAVINGS

Our work and reviews by inspectors general identified numerous instances where agencies had an excessive number of vehicles in their fleets. If these vehicles were disposed of, agencies could realize savings ranging from thousands to millions of dollars, as illustrated in the following examples:

- In February 2004, the Department of the Interior's Inspector General reported that a significant portion of the department's fleet of approximately 36,000 vehicles is underutilized and estimated savings of \$34 million.

- At the end of fiscal year 2003, Navy reviews of selected activities estimated fleet savings of \$3.7 million per year if installations reduced their fleets based on recommendations from these reviews.
- In 2003, a U.S. Army Audit Agency report identified one Army garrison that had retained 99 excess vehicles in its fleet.
- A 2001 Veterans Affairs' Inspector General report noted that accountability over the department's owned vehicles at a medical center could not be reasonably assured. For example, agency auditors found one vehicle that had been parked behind a laundry facility and had not been moved since it was purchased in 1997. The report described the acquisition of the vehicle as unjustified.

Appendix I contains additional examples of reports that highlight potential savings if unnecessary vehicles were eliminated from agencies' fleets.

In other cases, locations have reduced their fleet size—primarily because of pressure to cut their budgets—and consequently realized savings, as illustrated in the following examples:

- A Navy command decreased its fleet from 156 to 105 vehicles over the course of a year, resulting in savings of about \$12,000 per month. A Navy official explained that the decrease in vehicles was driven by cuts in the command's budget.
- A Veterans Affairs medical center, in an effort to find potential savings, reduced its fleet by 12 vehicles, with estimated savings of about \$57,000 per year.
- In the 1990s, a Forest Service region eliminated 500 leased vehicles when the agency reduced its workforce due to budget reductions, according to a regional official.

However, because these reductions were not based on the application of utilization criteria to identify vehicle needs, there is no guarantee that the fleets are the right size to meet the agencies' missions.

Industry practice for cost-efficient fleets also calls for an assessment of the type of vehicles being acquired. Savings can be realized by changing the composition of the fleet—buying vehicles that are less expensive and less costly to operate and maintain. We found cases where local level officials had taken this step. For example, in assessing the need for vehicles to expand community outreach services, program

officials at a Veterans Affairs medical center are replacing 15 passenger vans with less expensive sedans and minivans that will still allow them to accomplish the program's goals. In another case, a local Navy fleet manager was able to help a security organization reduce its fleet costs by using less expensive trucks for carrying dogs used by law enforcement officials.

GOVERNMENTWIDE INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE FLEET MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

As a result of a review of governmentwide fleet practices, GSA's Office of Governmentwide Policy (OGP) and OMB are taking actions to require agencies to better manage and improve the cost-efficiency of their fleets. In 2002, OGP initiated a review of federal agencies' fleet management practices in cooperation with OMB. Twenty-one agencies responded to a GSA survey, which found, among other things, that the vast majority of agencies lack utilization criteria by which to determine vehicle needs and identify underutilized vehicles. The survey further found that many agencies have little control over fleet budgets and allocation levels for vehicles and lack effective fleet management information systems. Based on the survey results, OGP is currently revising the Federal Management Regulation to require agencies to improve fleet management practices by, among other things, (1) appointing a central fleet manager, (2) periodically reviewing fleet size, and (3) funding a fleet management information system.

In 1994, we reported that the primary role of a central fleet manager is to establish and monitor written policies, collect and analyze fleet data, and look for opportunities to improve fleet operations. OGP officials believe that effective fleet management requires centralizing control at the headquarters level over all decisions related to fleet size. Thus, OGP will require agencies to appoint a senior management official with decision-making authority and control over all aspects of the agency's fleet program, including the entire fleet budget and approval of local-level decisions. However, we anticipate strong opposition to this requirement, based on our discussions with agency officials outside of GSA. Many of the headquarters officials we interviewed believe that local-level fleet managers, given the right tools, are in the best position to make decisions on the need for vehicles and that centralized oversight, rather than control over the budgets and decision making, would be more appropriate.

The revised regulation will also require agencies to develop criteria against which to evaluate the need for vehicles and to use these criteria in performing annual fleet assessments. OGP officials told us that the regulation will not include examples of the different criteria that could be used to determine vehicle needs. Instead, this type of information will be incorporated in GSA bulletins issued periodically to agencies and posted on the GSA Web site. Based on the results of the 2002 survey, OGP had planned to recommend that agencies base their decisions about the need for vehicles on a staff-to-vehicle ratio; however, officials told us they will require agencies to consider other measures more appropriate to a vehicle's mission. As discussed above, industry practices include establishing multiple utilization criteria, such as mileage, number of trips per day and hours on station, because of the differing nature of agency missions.

OGP further intends to require agencies to fund a fleet management information system that would allow them to accurately collect information on the cost to acquire, operate, and maintain their fleets. This initiative will allow agencies to better forecast fleet funding and make well-founded decisions about when to replace vehicles. OGP plans to issue guidelines defining the minimum functional requirements for the system. Officials we spoke with at Defense, DHS, and Veterans Affairs stated that they believe that developing a fleet management system is important, but they are at varying stages of exploring options, requesting bids from contractors, and requesting funding.

While OGP believes it has the authority to require agencies to follow its regulation and guidelines, enforcement will be another matter. OGP officials plan to work with agencies in a cooperative effort, through workshops and federal fleet conferences, to help them implement the requirements in the upcoming regulation, which they expect to issue in October 2004. They are also considering issuing "report cards" on the progress agencies are making in implementing and following the revised regulation.

OMB has also taken steps to hold agencies accountable for more effective fleet management practices. In 2002, OMB began requiring agencies, as part of their budget submission, to report the size, composition, and cost of their fleets for the current year and to project costs for the next 3 fiscal years (Office of Management and Budget, 2003). The narrative in the report must also detail the reasons for any significant changes in fleet size, discuss the methodology used to assign

vehicles, and identify any impediments to managing the fleets. Recognizing the difficulties with collecting reliable data, GSA and OMB plan to work with agencies to improve their data collection and reporting. Officials believe that as agencies move to better fleet management information systems, the data will improve.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite long-standing concerns over the size of the federal fleet, the agencies we reviewed still do not know if their fleets are the right size and composition. Until agencies develop and apply utilization criteria tied to the mission of the vehicles in their fleets, they will not know how many vehicles they need to meet their missions. Moreover, by not using such criteria to assess their fleets periodically, agencies are missing the potential opportunity to identify excess vehicles, reduce their fleets, and save money. While some agencies have started to take actions to improve fleet management, at this time it is unclear how successful these efforts will be in providing more efficient fleet management. Because of its role in providing fleet management policy, GSA's Office of Governmentwide Policy is in a position to take the lead in assisting agencies to develop appropriate utilization criteria and to assess their fleet size and composition. That office, in conjunction with OMB, has taken steps to focus attention at a governmentwide level on the need to improve fleet management practices. However, the plan to require agencies to centralize budget control over their fleets is a contentious one, and it remains to be seen how agencies will respond once the draft regulation is issued. In the meantime, additional measures are needed to ensure that the federal government's fleet does not contain excessive numbers of vehicles.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE ACTION

To help agencies determine the appropriate size and composition of their fleets, we recommend that the Administrator of GSA direct the Office of Governmentwide Policy to include in the revised Federal Management Regulation the following two requirements for agencies

- develop utilization criteria related to the missions of the vehicles and
- conduct periodic assessments of the number and type of vehicles in their fleets using these criteria.

To bring further attention to the potential budget impact of retaining excessive vehicles, we recommend that the Director of OMB require agencies, as part of the new reporting requirement in their budget submissions, to report on (1) the criteria they used to determine the need for vehicles and (2) the results of fleet assessments they have conducted. To ensure that agency fleets are the right size and composition to meet their missions, we recommend that the Secretaries of the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Homeland Security, and Veterans Affairs take the following three actions

- establish guidance and policies that include clearly defined utilization criteria to be used in validating the need for vehicles based on their missions;
- require fleet managers to use these criteria in determining the need for vehicles and in conducting periodic fleet assessments; and
- establish effective oversight mechanisms to ensure that the utilization criteria are defined and fleet assessments are carried out.

NOTES

1. TEMCs are responsible for the management of transportation equipment at the Navy command level including assignment, replacement, and approval of transportation equipment requirements.

REFERENCES

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