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Does EPA Need Guns, Ammo And Armor To Protect The Environment?

By STEPHEN MOORE
INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

Coming Heavy

EPA expenditures on "criminal enforcement"

- \$1.4 million for "guns up to 300mm"
- \$683,000 for "communications security equipment"
- \$300,000 in "infrared technology for homeland security needs"
- \$380,000 for "ammunition"
- \$210,000 for "camouflage and other deceptive equipment"
- \$208,000 for "radar and night-vision equipment"
- \$58,000 in "miscellaneous weapons"
- \$31,000 for "armament training devices"
- \$42,000 for "special ammunition"
- \$118,000 for "urgently needed police radios"

Source: Open the Books

The Environmental Protection Agency spent millions of dollars over the last decade on guns, ammo, body armor, camouflage equipment, unmanned aircraft, amphibious assault ships, radar and night-vision gear and other military-style weaponry and surveillance activities, according to a new report by the watchdog group Open the Books.

The report raises questions about why EPA's enforcement division employs well-armed "special agents" who appear to be conducting SWAT-type operations on American businesses and households it suspects of wrongdoing.

Illinois-based Open the Books scanned tens of thousands of checks written by the EPA and totaling more than \$93 billion from 2000 to 2014.

The audit discovered hundreds of millions of dollars of questionable expenses, including high-end luxury furnishings, sports equipment and

"environmental justice" grants to raise awareness of global warming.

It also revealed that seven of 10 EPA workers make more than \$100,000 a year and that more than 12,000 of its nearly 16,000 employees were given bonuses last year despite agency budgets that were supposed to be constrained by budget caps and sequester cuts.

EPA's \$8 billion budget also found room for more than 1,000 attorneys, which would make the agency one of the largest law firms in the nation.

And more than \$50 million of EPA funds since 2000 went to international organizations — dollars that flowed to countries such as China and Mexico. These activities appear to have little or no connection to the EPA mandate of safeguarding the air and water here in the U.S.

But the eye-grabber in the report is the agency's ongoing military-type purchases. Some \$75 million is authorized each year for criminal enforcement, including money for a small militia of 200 "special agents" that appear to be snooping on industry and preparing to use deadly force to enforce EPA edicts.

"We were shocked ourselves to find these kind of pervasive expenditures at an agency that is supposed to be involved in clean air and clean water," said Open the Books' founder, Adam Andrzejewski. "Some of these weapons are for full-scale military operations."

Those who keep an eye on the agency have also been stunned by such outlays. "EPA has always been primarily an agency that is involved in analysis and regulation. Even its enforcement arm is mainly involved in litigation," notes Marlo Lewis, who covers environmental issues for the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

"Since when did we start going down this road of allowing agencies of government to engage in military-style operations?"

In 2013, the EPA was involved in what many residents called an armed raid at a small town in Alaska where local miners were accused of polluting local waters. Fox News reported that EPA "armed agents in full body armor participated."

The Justice Department has reported that there are now 40 federal agencies with more than 100,000 officers authorized to carry guns and make arrests. They include the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Park Service.

EPA has numerous joint projects with the Homeland Security Department. In 1988 the agency's criminal enforcement division was granted police powers.

The EPA website describes the activities and mission of the criminal enforcement division as "investigating cases, collecting evidence, conducting forensic analyses and providing legal guidance to assist in the prosecution of criminal conduct that threatens people's health and the environment." But nothing about the use of lethal force.

Asked for comment on the Open the Books findings, EPA said purchases of armaments are necessary for "environmental crime-fighting."

"For more than 30 years," it said, "there has been broad, bipartisan agreement about the importance of an armed, fully-equipped team of EPA agents working with state and federal partners to uphold the law and protect Americans."

The equipment is needed to "access potential crime scenes as quickly as possible," it added.

One former EPA administrator with more than 30 years at the agency says of the Open the Books report: "EPA has been increasingly captured by the environmental left, and the purchases of military-style armaments has increased accordingly."

The new report comes at a time when the EPA is under fire over a new regulation approved last week by the agency to tighten ozone emission rules. The National Association of Manufacturers calls it one of the most expensive EPA rules ever.

There's also a fight in Washington over whether federal agencies can withstand another sequester spending reduction without jeopardizing vital services. The White House says further agency cuts would be disastrous.

But reports such as the latest by Open the Books are sure to be promoted by Republicans as evidence of rampant waste and misspending.

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