

U.S. rethinks giving excess military gear to police

By Tami Abdollah and Eric Tucker, AP

WASHINGTON — After a decade of sending military equipment to civilian police departments across the country, federal officials are reconsidering the idea in light of the violence in Ferguson, Missouri.

The public has absorbed images of heavily armed police, snipers trained on protesters and tear gas plumes. Against that backdrop, Attorney General Eric Holder said that when police and citizens need to restore calm, “I am deeply concerned that the deployment of military equipment and vehicles sends a conflicting message.”

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., said police responses like that in Ferguson have “become the problem instead of the solution.” Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., said he will introduce legislation to reverse police militarization.

Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said his committee will review the program to determine if the Defense Department’s surplus equipment is being used as intended.

One night after the violence that accompanied the presence of military-style equipment in Ferguson, tensions eased when a police captain, unprotected and shaking hands, walked through a crowd in a gesture of reconciliation. The contrast added to perception that the tanks and tear gas had done more harm than good.

As the country concludes its longest wartime period, the military has turned over thousands of surplus weapons and armored trucks to local police who often trained alongside the

military.

A report by the American Civil Liberties Union in June said police agencies had become “excessively militarized,” with officers using training and equipment designed for the battlefield on city streets. The report found the amount of goods transferred through the military surplus program rose from \$1 million in 1990 to nearly \$450 million in 2013.

“Every police force of any size in this country has access to those kinds of weapons now,” said David Harris, a police expert at the University of Pittsburgh law school. “It makes it more likely to be used (and) is an escalation all by itself.”

In Louisiana, masked police in full body armor carrying AR-15 assault rifles raided a nightclub without a warrant, looking not for terrorists but underage drinkers and fire-code violations. Officers in California train using the same counterinsurgency tactics as those used in Afghanistan.

“They’re not coming in like we’re innocent until proven guilty,” said Quinn Eaker. SWAT teams last August raided his organic farm and community, the Garden of Eden, in Arlington, Texas. “They’re coming in like: ‘We’re gonna kill you if you move a finger.’”

Police found no drugs or weapons and filed no charges after their search, which authorities said followed standard procedure.

In 1990, Congress authorized the Pentagon to give surplus equipment to police to help fight drugs, which then gave way to the fight against terrorism. Though violent crime nationwide is at its lowest level in generations and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have largely concluded, the military transfers have increased.

Police say the equipment, which includes full body armor,

night vision goggles and scopes, keeps officers safe and prepares them for the worst case.

“A lot evolved from the military, no question,” said Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Chief Bill McSweeney, who heads the detective division. “Is it smart for them to use that stuff and perhaps look like soldiers from Iraq going into a place? Is that smart or over the top? I’d say generally that’s smart. Now, if you use that every time a guy is writing bad checks, that’s getting rather extreme.”

The U.S. has provided 610 mine-resistant armored trucks, known as MRAPs, across the country, nearly all since August 2013, including at least nine in Los Angeles County, according to Michelle McCaskill, a spokeswoman for the Defense Logistics Agency.

In rural western Maine, the Oxford County Sheriff’s Office, which had not reported a murder in more than 20 years, asked for an MRAP. Cpl. George Cayer, wrote in his request that Maine’s western foothills face a “previously unimaginable threat from terrorist activities.”

In Orange County, Florida, masked officers in tactical gear helped state inspectors raid barber shops in 2010 to find people cutting hair without a license. Using a mini battering ram and pry bar at times, police arrested dozens of people. Officials said they found illegal items such as drugs and a weapon.

McSweeney said it’s hard to argue that police shouldn’t use the best equipment available.

“It’s tempting to say, ‘Shouldn’t we wear these things? Shouldn’t we approach this as if we could get shot?’” he said. “How do you say no to that question?”

Nick Gragnani, executive director of the St. Louis Area Regional Response System, said such supplies have proved

essential in hurricane relief efforts and other disaster responses.

“The shame of it will be ... if somebody does a brushstroke and takes out all the funding and then we can no longer be prepared for that big incident,” he said.

The LAPD’s deputy chief, Michael Downing, who heads the department’s counterterrorism and special operations bureau, said officers are dealing with “an adversary who is more sophisticated, more tactically trained.”

Downing emphasized that though police might train with soldiers, they’re not warriors with a mission to kill but public servants with no “enemies.”

“In police work there are times we have to become soldiers and control through force and fear,” Downing said. “But we have to come back to being a public servant as quick as we can to establish that normality and that ethical stature with communities, because they’re the ones who give us the authority to do our police work.”

1 dead, 1 hurt in Placerville plane crash

One person died and another was seriously injured when the plane they were in was trying to land Saturday night at a Placerville airport.

The Starduster biplane was headed for Swansboro Airport just before 7pm Aug. 16. El Dorado County sheriff’s deputies said after circling the airport once the aircraft disappeared out

of sight. The plane with its two male occupants was found a short ways from the airport. The airport is 4.5 miles north of Placerville

One person was pronounced dead at the scene, while the other was flown to Sutter Roseville Medical Center. The names of the pilot and passenger have not been released.

The National Transportation Safety Board and Federal Aviation Administration are investigating.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Congressional support for Tahoe funding iffy

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy News Service

WASHINGTON – Capitol Hill and courthouse shadows will cloud the Lake Tahoe Summit that convenes Tuesday.

No doubt, the political A-listers gathering for the 18th annual summit have much to celebrate, starting with the spectacular views from the location near South Lake Tahoe. They also have their work cut out for them.

“We have our challenges, environmentally,” Amy Berry, CEO of the Tahoe Fund, said in an interview. “There’s a lot more to be done.”

Little time, for instance, remains for the current Congress to finish Lake Tahoe restoration bills introduced in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act would authorize \$415 million over 10 years for

forest fuels management, watershed restoration, storm-water management and other projects. It would continue an earlier law passed in 2000 but that expired in 2010.

The House version introduced last October has not yet had a hearing.

Underscoring the political challenge, the House bill is not co-sponsored by Republican Rep. Tom McClintock, whose district spans California's share of the 191-square-mile lake. In the Senate, where members of the minority party can easily erect roadblocks, four Republicans voted against the Senate's version in committee in June.

Brian Baluta, spokesman for the House bill's author, Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., said, "We hope to get a hearing by the end of this Congress."

Read the whole story

Republicans' 'Fire Harry Reid' campaign grows

By Amber Phillips, Las Vegas Sun

WASHINGTON — Sen. Harry Reid is not running for re-election, but Republicans are turning up the volume on a new campaign slogan to "Fire Harry Reid."

With momentum recently swinging to their side to take back the Senate in November, the Republican National Committee is sending out a memo to reporters and donors daring Democrats in tough re-election campaigns to distance themselves from the Senate leader. The committee launched the anti-Reid campaign

in late July with robocalls and a social media push, #FireReid.

The strategy is to paint Reid, the Senate majority leader, as the boogeyman, especially for voters in Republican-leaning states with contested Senate races that could decide the future of the Senate, said Michael Short, an RNC spokesman.

“He’s not a very popular figure, he’s the face of Senate Democrats,” Short said.

Kristen Orthman, a Reid spokeswoman, said Republicans are attacking Reid because he calls them out for not helping get legislation passed. Reid also said on the Senate floor in May that Republicans’ attacks against him are a sign nothing else is working.

Read the whole story

NTPUD institutes mandatory water conservation

North Tahoe Public Utility District’s board of directors this week voted to implement Stage 2 mandatory water conservation measures and established an enforcement plan for customers.

The district had been under a Stage 1 voluntary conservation program since February.

The prohibitions include:

- Washing sidewalks, driveways, and other hard surfaces
- Excessive plumbing leaks not repaired
- Excessive irrigation run-off

- Irrigating between 11am-6pm
- Non-commercial washing of privately-owned vehicles, trailers, RV's, bikes and boats except from a bucket and a hose equipped with a shut-off nozzle for rinsing
- Water for single-pass evaporative cooling systems
- Water for new non-recirculating industrial clothes wash systems
- Filling or refilling swimming pools
- Use of potable water for dust control except as a condition in a permit issued by a state or federal agency
- Use of fire hydrants except for public health and safety or unless used for dust control as a condition in a permit issued by a state or federal agency – must have a hydrant meter.

Violators will first be warned. Then fines will be issued for subsequent offenses.

Truckee hospital part of lung cancer trial

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

A national lung cancer trial launched earlier this summer with the help of a UC Davis oncologist has the potential to dramatically affect the way cancer drugs will be developed in the future.

The trial, called Lung-MAP, puts a cancer-fighting approach into action that uses genomic profiling. This involves testing a patient's tumors for "bio markers," or genetic identifiers, that can help physicians determine which genetically targeted drugs will work for them.

The current course of treatment for lung cancer presents patients a range of therapies, some toxic, that are not targeted for that individual's cancer. Elizabeth Lacasia, a stage 4 lung cancer patient and active support group participant at the Bonnie J. Addario Lung Cancer Foundation in the Bay Area, called it "throwing spaghetti on the wall to see if something sticks."

The launch is a collaboration between the National Cancer Institute, the Southwest Oncology Group, Friends of Cancer Research, the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health and five pharmaceutical companies. As part of the newly formed National Clinical Trials Network, or NCTN, the study will have access to more than 400 trial sites nationwide, 200 of which have already launched. The rest will join in the coming months.

Sites at the Gene Upshaw Memorial Tahoe Forest Cancer Center in Truckee and the Rideout Cancer Center in Marysville also have been activated, along with the UC San Diego Moores Cancer Center.

Read the whole story

Judge orders Calif. to teach English learners

By Brian Melley, AP

LOS ANGELES – California was ordered to educate all children who don't speak English after reports revealed a quarter of its school districts fail to meet that requirement, which is mandated by both the federal government and California itself.

Judge James Chalfant said it is particularly important that the California Department of Education determine the best way to make sure the requirement is met in a state where more than fifth of students are deficient in English.

"You've got to go ferret this out because you can't have even one child that isn't getting their instructional services," Chalfant said in issuing Tuesday's order. "You have a report that 20,000 aren't getting their instructional services. That's not good enough."

The American Civil Liberties Union, which represented three Spanish-speaking Compton students in the lawsuit that led to Chalfant's ruling, claimed language barriers held students back a grade or led to low test scores.

ACLU lawyer Mark Rosenbaum said he was thrilled with the ruling, but added it was unfortunate he had to go to court to make the state investigate why children aren't getting proper instruction.

"The state can't disconnect the 911 phone when it gets news that children are not receiving instructional services," he said.

Attorneys for the state wouldn't comment after the ruling. The Department of Education also declined to comment.

The ACLU brought the suit after finding figures on the state Education Department's website that showed 20,300 English learners were not given language instruction. The numbers were reported to the state by school districts statewide as part of a broader census.

Statewide, 251 school districts reported deficiencies in educating English learners. They ranged from Los Angeles Unified School District, which said it didn't educate 4,150 of 194,904 English learners, to Twain Harte-Long Barn Union Elementary in the Sierra foothills, which failed to teach its

lone English learner, according to the ACLU. The results showed that Compton, where the three students were from, failed to educate 1,697, or 16 percent, of its 10,505 English learners.

Chara Crane, deputy attorney general, argued that the report was not reliable because some of the districts didn't respond properly and it was not intended to monitor English language instruction. The state also said the case shouldn't be in court because the three Compton students were all proficient English speakers.

But Chalfant asked why a school district would say it wasn't providing classes if it was providing those services. At the least, he said, the state had a duty to investigate further.

Rosenbaum said that when confronted with the figures, the state put out a press release proclaiming it educated 98 percent of students who needed English instruction. He said that amounted to an admission schools weren't following state and federal laws requiring an equal education for all students.

Crane said the ACLU had not provided evidence of one student who had been deprived of services.

Chalfant returned again and again to the state's own findings, saying there was credible evidence it had failed to provide necessary schooling.

"I'm ordering you to do something," Chalfant said, although he added the specifics were up to the state. "If I'm wrong, the court of appeal will have something to say."

\$7.5 bil. water bond to be on Calif. ballot

By Melanie Mason, Los Angeles Times

California lawmakers approved a ballot measure for a \$7.5 billion water bond Wednesday evening, following an eleventh-hour scramble to secure bipartisan support by increasing funding for new reservoirs.

Soon after lawmakers wrapped up, Brown signed AB1471 by Assemblyman Anthony Rendon, D-Lakewood, one of two identical measures they had approved. It had passed the Assembly on a 77-2 vote and won unanimous approval in the Senate.

"We hit the sweet spot when it comes to a balance between the various water needs of California – between storage, groundwater, clean drinking water and the whole host of other investments that are in this bond," said Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, in an interview before the vote.

As for the costs, Steinberg added, "I think \$7.5 [billion] hits it just about right."

Sen. Jim Nielsen, R-Gerber, said past water plans were too focused on the Sacramento Delta, and the new bond recognizes the water supply needs of the whole state as well as the water rights of farmers and others.

Read the whole story

Truckee man accused of having sex with minor

Erwin Bosbeli Cifuentes-Perez, 24, of Truckee was arrested Aug. 12 on charges of having sex with a minor.

The victim's parents contacted Truckee officers to report the relationship between the victim and suspect who lives in Kings Beach.

Detectives determined the relationship was consensual, however the suspect is several years older than the victim. This makes the sexual relationship illegal.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Tahoe shoreline troubles a mystery to scientists

By Kathryn Reed

It doesn't take science for people to know Lake Tahoe's shoreline is growing as the drought persists. But it does take science to determine the health of those waters.

The annual "Tahoe: State of the Lake Report 2014" was released today by the Tahoe Environmental Research Center at UC Davis.

"While this year's data shows that progress is being made on many fronts, the biggest concern is what is not able to be shown," TERC Director Geoff Schladow said in a statement Aug. 14. "This really applies to the near shore where most people

experience the lake. Even with the planned increase in monitoring, why it is continuing to degrade is poorly understood. I'm hoping the near shore network will start to fill that void."



Emerald Bay and Lake Tahoe
in April 2013. Photo/LTN
file

The Near Shore Agency Working Group is tasked with figuring out why there is so much muck near the shore line. Algae and other plant life have been steadily growing, and the once clear waters are often brown. Periphyton is the algae found on rocks.

It wasn't until this year that scientists in the respective agencies that regulate and study Lake Tahoe decided to make a concerted effort to find out why the degradation is occurring and what can be done about it. The first six of 20 near shore monitoring stations will be installed this month. This will give researchers real-time data about water quality. They will be installed on private and public property.

Most of the studies that have been conducted at Lake Tahoe since 1968 involve monitoring the clarity in the middle of the lake with a disc that looks like a white dinner plate. While some of that data will help with near shore issues, most of it won't.

The good thing about a drought is that it means less sediment reaching the lake from runoff. It's fine sediment that scientists say is the leading cause of the decline of lake clarity.

The current State of the Lake Report explains how drought, climate change, and other natural and human factors are driving changes at Lake Tahoe.

2013 was the second consecutive year Lake Tahoe did not mix to its full depth. The lack of mixing was because surface temperatures were higher.

July 2013's surface temp of 65.6 degrees was the highest recorded in five years. This was 1.8 degrees more than 2012.

The loss of near shore clarity and rising temperatures creates a breeding ground for invasive species.

Alan Heyvaert, an associate research professor and director of the Center for Watersheds and Environmental Sustainability at the Desert Research Institute, is leading a group of researchers studying the near shore.

UNR and DRI researchers have installed cameras on mountaintops that in part are being used to study the near shore. They have documented a 90 percent decline in small species that live in the sand at the bottom of the lake – stoneflies, worms and bottom shrimp. Those species are important to the lake's food chain.

But also alarming is the discovery of new species.

"Changes in the length of seasons will alter the way in which water moves in the lake, leading to the possible loss of dissolved oxygen at the bottom of the lake," the State of the Lake Report says.

This in turn will also change the ecosystem because the chemical balance in the lake will be altered. This, too, will

affect aquatic life.

Researchers are predicting that by the end of this century, summer may be two months longer than it was in the 1960s, and maximum temperatures may have risen by 8 degrees.

“With regard to climate change, we have really only scratched the surface,” Schladow said. “We have little understanding of how extreme events will play out and impact the Tahoe basin and the Sierra.”

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Notes:

- Tahoe Environmental Research Center Director Geoff Schladow will present highlights from “Tahoe: State of the Lake 2014” on Aug. 14 from 5:30-7:30pm at TERC, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village.
- Here is the full report.