

Audit Report

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**Office of the Sheriff**

**Firearms Inventory**

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Office of the County Auditor  
Baltimore County, Maryland  
June 2010



**BALTIMORE COUNTY , MARYLAND  
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY AUDITOR**

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MARY P. ALLEN, CPA  
COUNTY AUDITOR

June 25, 2010

Honorable Members of the County Council  
Honorable James T. Smith, Jr., County Executive  
Baltimore County, Maryland

We have audited the procedures and controls over the Office of the Sheriff's firearms inventory for the period from July 1, 2006 through July 10, 2009. As of July 10, 2009, the Office's inventory consisted of 108 firearms.

Our audit disclosed that the Office did not establish adequate segregation of duties over the firearms inventory and the armory's spare keys; did not always comply with its procedures for conducting quarterly inventories of armory weapons; did not always maintain accurate firearms inventory records or complete armory log records of firearm assignments; and did not establish written procedures for its practice of maintaining an armory spare key log.

A response to our findings from the Office of the Sheriff is included as Appendix A to this report. Our comments regarding the Office's response are included as Appendix B.

We wish to express our appreciation to the Office for the cooperation and assistance extended to us during our audit.

Our audit reports and responses thereto are available to the public and may be obtained on-line at "[www.baltimorecountymd.gov/agencies/auditor](http://www.baltimorecountymd.gov/agencies/auditor)" or by contacting the Office of the County Auditor, 400 Washington Avenue, Towson, Maryland 21204.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary P. Allen".

Mary P. Allen, CPA, CGFM  
County Auditor

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## **Background**

The Office of the Sheriff is responsible for transportation of inmates and pre-trial detainees between the various courts and institutions, process service of court papers, and Circuit Court security. In this regard, the Office maintains an inventory of firearms that includes handguns and shotguns. As of July 10, 2009, the Office's inventory totaled 108 firearms consisting of 95 handguns and 13 shotguns. Of the 95 handguns, 81 were assigned to sworn personnel (i.e., Sheriff, Undersheriff, and Deputy Sheriffs). The remaining 14 handguns and the 13 shotguns were stored in the Office's armory and used as spares, for training, and in parades. On June 27, 2007, the Office implemented written procedures for operating the armory.

## Findings and Recommendations

### **1. Adequate segregation of duties was not established to account for the firearms inventory and to safeguard the spare keys to the armory.**

Effective internal control requires the segregation of incompatible duties to prevent and detect errors, fraud, or irregularities. An "incompatible" duty is one that would put a single individual in the position of being able to both commit an illegal act and then conceal it. Our audit disclosed that two employees responsible for maintaining the firearms inventory records also had physical access to the related firearms and one of these individuals also participated in the periodic inventory verifications. Our audit further disclosed that one employee who has access to the spare keys to the armory is solely responsible for maintaining the spare key log. These conditions result in an increased risk that firearms could be diverted or removed from inventory without detection.

**To improve internal control, we recommend that the Office utilize existing personnel to segregate incompatible duties. Specifically, an employee that has physical access to firearms or the armory keys should not have related recordkeeping responsibilities.**

### **2. The Office did not always conduct quarterly inventories of armory weapons in accordance with its written procedures and did not have a written policy that required periodic physical inventories of individually assigned weapons.**

On June 27, 2007, the Office implemented written armory procedures that require quarterly (i.e., January, April, July, and October) physical inventory counts of all weapons stored in the armory. The procedures require the chief firearms instructor and a person of a higher rank, or the quartermaster, to conduct the inventory. The procedures prohibit the same higher-ranking individual or the quartermaster from conducting an inventory for two or more consecutive quarters.

For individually assigned weapons, the Office did not have a written policy that required periodic physical inventories of the weapons. However, in practice the Office periodically inspected individually assigned weapons for proper operating condition for individuals present at roll call assemblies and, as part of the inspection, verified the weapon assignment (the serial number on the weapon) to the inventory listing. For individuals not present at those roll call assemblies, the inspection and inventory verification was delayed until a later time when they either attended another roll call or

attended the annual firing range weapon qualification session. This practice did not ensure that all individually assigned weapons were accounted for at a particular point in time or over a given time period such as a 1-week or 2-week period.

During our audit, we noted the following specific exceptions:

- Three quarterly armory inventories (July 2007, July 2008, and April 2009) were not conducted as required;
- Two quarterly armory inventories were performed in a different month than prescribed by the procedures – one in May 2008 rather than in April 2008 and the other in September 2008 rather than in October 2008;
- One quarterly armory inventory (May 2008) was conducted by the chief firearms instructor and a deputy that was not of a higher rank as required; and
- The Office could not provide documentation to evidence that all individually assigned weapons were verified to the inventory listing during FY 2007.

Our audit further disclosed that prior to June 27, 2007, the Office had conducted incomplete quarterly inventories of the armory. In particular, the Office's inventory documentation omitted the shotguns and handguns used for training, did not always identify the individual(s) that conducted the inventory, and did not always provide evidence that all weapons were in the armory.

Without adequate inventory procedures, there is an increased risk that a firearm could be diverted from the Office's control without timely detection.

**To ensure that all firearms are adequately safeguarded, we recommend that the Office comply with its quarterly armory inventory procedures, establish written procedures to require periodic physical inventories of individually assigned weapons, and maintain adequate documentation to evidence that physical inventory procedures were completed for all weapons as required.**

### **3. The Office's firearms inventory records were not always accurate.**

The Office's firearms inventory records should include all handguns assigned to sworn personnel and all weapons stored in the armory. However, our audit disclosed that the Office's firearms inventory records were not always accurate. Specifically, our review disclosed that five handguns were omitted from the inventory records as of June 27, 2007.

Inaccurate firearms inventory records increase the risk that a firearm could be diverted from the Office's control without timely detection.

**We recommend that the Office maintain a complete and accurate inventory list of all firearms at all times.**

**4. The armory log did not always contain complete records of each firearm assignment and the armory procedures did not require countersignatures when a firearm was returned to the armory.**

On June 27, 2007, the Office implemented written armory procedures that require a log to be maintained to record personnel entering the armory noting the purpose for entering and the date and time of entry and departure. The procedures also require that the log record the removal of a weapon from the armory. For each firearm removed, the procedures require that the removal date and time; weapon's serial number; issuing deputy's name; reason for removal; and receiving deputy's signature be recorded in the log. However, our audit disclosed that the armory log did not always contain complete records of each firearm assignment as required. Specifically, our review of 35 armory log records disclosed that certain signatures and information were missing from 23 records as follows:

- The issuing deputy's exit times were missing from 16 records;
- The issuing deputy's entry times were missing from 10 records;
- The purpose for entering the armory was missing from 7 records; and
- The signature of the deputy receiving the weapon was missing from 3 records.

Our review further disclosed that while the armory custodian initials the armory log when weapons are returned to the armory, the person returning the firearm is not required to countersign the log. Additionally, the armory log is not organized in an orderly manner (e.g., a pre-printed form with labeled columns) to ensure that all required information is recorded for each log entry or to ensure that entries are clearly labeled. Finally, the log does not record the issue and return information for the same weapon on the same line, making it difficult to track outstanding weapons.

An incomplete and unorganized armory log increases the risk that a firearm could be diverted from the Office's control without timely detection.

**To ensure that firearms are adequately safeguarded, we recommend that the Office comply with its procedures to maintain complete armory log records of all persons entering the armory and all firearms assignments. We further**

**recommend that the Office amend its procedures to require the person returning a weapon to the armory to sign the armory log. Finally, we recommend that the Office organize the armory log to improve its accuracy and effectiveness.**

**5. The procedures for the armory spare key log were not in writing.**

The Office maintains a spare set of keys to the armory in the event that the three authorized employees with assigned keys are not available. The keys are kept in a sealed envelope inside a locked box mounted on the wall in the quartermaster's office. The envelope is date- and time-stamped to evidence the removal and return of the keys to the wall box. In addition, the Office maintains a log to record each time the spare armory keys are used. The procedures require the log to contain the date, time, name of the individual accessing the keys, and reason for each use of the spare keys. However, these procedures are not in writing.

The lack of written procedures for the spare key log increases the risk that a firearm could be removed from the armory without timely detection.

**We recommend that the Office put in writing its procedures for safeguarding the spare armory keys.**

## **Audit Scope, Objective, and Methodology**

We have audited the procedures and controls for the firearms inventory maintained by the Office of the Sheriff for the period July 1, 2006 through July 10, 2009. The audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, except for the requirement of an external quality control review. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objective.

In accordance with the Baltimore County Charter, Section 311, the objective of our audit was to evaluate the adequacy of internal control practices and procedures over the Office's firearms inventory. In planning and conducting our audit, we focused on firearms controlled and managed by the Office based on assessments of materiality and risk.

Our audit procedures included inquiries of appropriate personnel, and inspections of documents, records, and firearms on hand. We also tested transactions and performed other auditing procedures that we considered necessary to achieve our objective.

The Office's management is responsible for establishing and maintaining effective internal control to safeguard its firearms inventory. Internal control is a process designed to provide reasonable assurance that objectives pertaining to the reliability of financial records, effectiveness and efficiency of operations including safeguarding of assets, and compliance with applicable laws, regulations, policies and procedures are achieved.

Because of inherent limitations in internal control, errors or fraud may nevertheless occur and not be detected. Also, projections of any evaluation of internal control to future periods are subject to the risk that conditions may change or compliance with policies and procedures may deteriorate.

Our reports on fiscal compliance are designed to assist the Baltimore County Council in exercising its legislative oversight function and to provide constructive recommendations for improving County operations. As a result, our reports generally do not address activities we reviewed that may be functioning properly.

This report includes findings and recommendations relating to conditions that we consider to be significant deficiencies in the design or operation of internal control and

administrative and operating practices and procedures that could adversely affect the Office's ability to maintain reliable financial records, operate effectively and efficiently, and/or comply with applicable laws, regulations, policies and procedures. Other less significant findings were communicated to the Office that did not warrant inclusion in this report.

**APPENDIX A**

**OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF**

**RESPONSE**

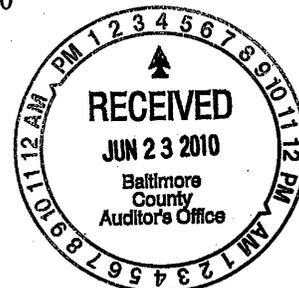


# SHERIFF

**R. Jay Fisher**  
401 Bosley Avenue  
Towson, Maryland 21204  
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June 22, 2010

Ms. Mary P. Allen, CPA, County Auditor  
Office of the County Auditor  
Baltimore County, Maryland  
Courthouse, Room 221  
Towson, Maryland 21204



Dear Ms. Allen:

I have received and reviewed the firearms inventory draft audit report dated June 2010. Each of the five findings and resulting recommendations are addressed separately below.

**1. Adequate segregation of duties.**

The recommendation has been adopted and record keeping responsibilities have been assigned to a member who has no access to the armory.

**2. Quarterly inventories of armory weapons and written policy for inventories of individually assigned weapons.**

Both items have been included in a new general order that will become effective within 30 days.

**3. The Office's firearms inventory records were not always accurate.**

The omission of five handguns from the June 27, 2007 inventory was an inadvertent administrative error. It was noted that the previous and subsequent inventory reports contained those weapons.

**4. The armory log did not always contain complete records of each firearm assignment and the armory procedures did not require countersignatures when a firearm was returned to the armory.**

The original armory log was established in 2007. During the time it was in use it was realized the log had design flaws which led to incomplete entries. So on August 26, 2009, we initiated a new bound log with numbered pages and preprinted column headings that specify required information for a complete entry. So far that has resolved the incomplete entry issue.

The recommendation included a requirement for members to sign the armory log upon his or her returning a weapon to the armory. However, that requirement is not practical. For instance, if a member were hospitalized during his or her tour of duty, he or she

Ms. Mary P. Allen, CPA, County Auditor  
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Baltimore County, Maryland  
June 22, 2010

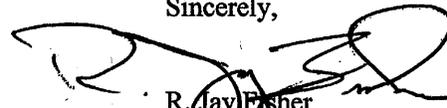
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would not be available to sign the log. If a weapon were returned as a result of a deputy's suspension, it would not be the prudent to require the member to enter the armory. If a person turns in his service weapon to a supervisor prior to vacation leave and no one with access to the armory is available, then the log could not be signed. Additionally, we strictly limit access to the armory, and this policy would unnecessarily hamper that effort.

**5. The procedures for the armory spare key log were not in writing.**  
Written procedures for the armory spare key log have now been prepared.

Please contact should any additional information be needed.

Sincerely,



R. Jay Fisher  
Sheriff

## **APPENDIX B**

### **AUDITOR'S COMMENTS ON AGENCY RESPONSE**

## **Appendix B**

### **Auditor's Comments on Agency Response**

Our report noted that the armory procedures did not require countersignatures when a firearm was returned to the armory. We recommended that the Office amend its procedures to require the person returning a weapon to the armory to sign the armory log. The Office's response indicates that this recommendation is not practical in cases where the individual who signed out a weapon is unable to return the weapon to the armory in person due to hospitalization, termination, or other circumstances. The countersignature recommendation, however, applies to any individual who returns a weapon to the armory. In cases where the individual is unable to return the weapon to the armory in person, then the individual who returns the weapon on their behalf should sign the armory log.

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