
Federal Financial Accounting And Auditing Technical Release 4: Reporting on Non-Valued Seized and Forfeited Property

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Summary

An analysis of changes for all material non-valued seized property should be disclosed in the financial statement footnotes in the same manner as prescribed for non-valued forfeited property.

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Introduction

Guidance for the accounting and reporting of seized and forfeited property held by Federal entities is provided in the Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Standard No. 3, *Accounting for Inventory and Related Property* (SFFAS No. 3), issued in October 1993. This Technical Release is intended to clarify the required reporting of non-valued seized and forfeited property.

[Agencies that must deal with non-valued seized and forfeited property should first refer to the hierarchy of accounting standards contained in the current Office of Management and Budget \(OMB\) Bulletin on “Form and Content of Agency Financial Statements” for guidance. Standards issued by Government Accountability Office \(GAO\) and OMB have precedence over other authoritative guidance for federal entities.](#)¹ This technical release supplements the relevant federal standards, but is not a substitute for and does not take precedence over the standards.

This Technical Release includes a discussion of the issues and recommended implementation guidance that is intended to clarify the reporting of non-valued seized and forfeited property. This guidance also provides more detailed terminology relating to the measurement of these non-valued items (see Appendix A ... [See consolidated glossary in Appendix E of this document] for the list of terms).

Background

Federal entities implementing this standard have raised numerous questions requiring clarification of the reporting of non-valued seized and forfeited property. Numerous Federal entities' missions include the task of seizing non-valued property. Bureaus within the Departments of the Treasury and Justice are most directly affected by this issue.

Non-valued property either does not have a legal market in the United States, or does not have a salable value to the Federal government. These items may be abandoned, embargoed, prohibited, sensitive, or seized for forfeiture. Examples of such items could include illegal drugs, counterfeit currencies and monetary instruments, and firearms, which the Federal government, as a matter of law or policy, does not return to the owner or sell upon forfeiture. Federal agencies that seize these types of items have had difficulty in applying the concept of materiality and in the reporting of these types of items since they do not have monetary value. Consequently, Federal agencies have independently determined what types of non-valued property should be disclosed

¹The Federal Accounting Standards Advisory Board recommends accounting concepts and standards to its principals; the Department of the Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget, and the General Accounting Office. If all three principals approve a recommendation it is issued by OMB and GAO.

in the financial statements under SFFAS No. 3 and the units of measure, resulting in inconsistent disclosures between agencies and disclosures that lacked meaningful information.

While non-valued seized property does not have a monetary value to the Federal government, the sensitive nature of much of this type of property requires the same level of accountability and security as valued property, if not more. Agencies should ensure that their systems of internal control are adequate to provide sufficient accountability and security over this property in order to meet the reporting requirements provided in SFFAS No. 3.

SFFAS No. 3 prescribes that seized property shall be accounted for in the financial records of the entity that is operating as the central fund (see SFFAS No. 3, para. 60). Central funds are established to finance the costs of the seizure, management, and disposition of property, and to receive the proceeds from the sale or disposition of that property. However, since non-valued items do not have a financial value, the central fund is not responsible for reporting these items.² Accordingly, the seizing or custodial entity is responsible for maintaining sufficient internal records to maintain control over these items and would have reporting responsibility for non-valued items.

Chapter 3 of the Statement of Federal Financial Accounting Concepts No. 1, *Objectives of Federal Financial Reporting* (SFFAC No. 1), identifies the users of Federal financial reports and their information needs. Federal financial report users need information to assess the accountability, stewardship, and operating performance of Federal agencies and programs. To address the information needs of Federal financial report users, Chapter 4 of SFFAC No. 1 defines the objectives of financial reporting as budgetary integrity, operating performance, stewardship, and systems and control. The discussion of these objectives emphasizes the concepts of the entity's control over, accountability of, and accomplishment of Federal programs and activities.

Furthermore, to provide additional useful perspective, SFFAS No. 3 includes a discussion on the concept of materiality. Specifically, the concept of materiality includes both quantitative and qualitative considerations. Thus, an item that is not considered material from a quantitative standpoint may be considered qualitatively material. Accordingly, items would be considered qualitatively material if the judgment of a person relying on the information presented about such items would be influenced by the omission or misstatement of information presented about those items. SFFAS No. 3 states that an item that is not considered material from a quantitative standpoint may be considered qualitatively material if it would influence or change the judgment of the financial statement user. It should be noted that SFFAS No. 3 also clearly states that items of a sensitive nature held by an entity that are not considered material to the entity's financial statements need not be reported.

²This is generally because the central fund does not take custody of nonvalued items.

Discussion of Issues

The disclosure requirements for seized and forfeited property are outlined in paragraphs 66 and 78 of SFFAS No. 3. Among the requirements is a footnote disclosure to contain: a description of the composition of the property; the methods of valuing the property; restrictions on the use of forfeited property; changes from prior year accounting methods, if any; and an analysis of changes in seized and forfeited property. The analysis of changes in seized and forfeited property should provide the dollar value and number of properties on hand at the beginning of the year, seizures and forfeitures made during the year, property disposed of and method of disposition, and property on hand at the end of the year. This information should be presented by type of property where material.

While SFFAS No. 3 provides adequate guidance for reporting seized and forfeited items with a financial value, the standard has not been interpreted and applied consistently with respect to non-valued items. Paragraph 148 of SFFAS No. 3 states that the standard was revised to address the disclosure requirements for non-valued items. For these items, the standard does not require the reporting of financial value, but it clearly requires the disclosure of all material forfeited property, including those items with no financial value. However, the standard does not address the disclosure of non-valued seized items. As a result, some reporting entities with seizing authority disclose non-valued seized items, and others do not. Clarification of the standard as it relates to non-valued seized items is needed to ensure consistent implementation.

With numerous professional disciplines involved in activities related to the seizure and reporting of non-valued items, some terminology has different meanings depending on whether it is used in a legal, accounting, or program management context. To provide for consistent and meaningful reporting, clarified definitions and standard units of measure are necessary.

Recommended Implementation Guidance

An analysis of changes for all material non-valued seized property should be disclosed in the financial statement footnotes in the same manner as prescribed for non-valued forfeited property.

The definitions in **Appendix A** ... [See consolidated glossary in Appendix E of this document] provide for consistent and meaningful reporting among Federal agencies that seize and/or forfeit non-valued items. The units of measurement for non-valued items provided in the **Attachment** are also designed to facilitate consistency in reporting among agencies. It is recognized that some agencies may be currently reporting in different measurement units and may be unable to convert their units of measurement for FY 1999 reporting. Such agencies may continue to report on their current basis for FY 1999 but should conform with the units of measurement provided in the Attachment for FY 2000 and subsequent years.

Attachment: Measurement Of Non-valued Items

Category	Standard Unit Of Measurement
Illegal Drugs	
Cannabis	Kilograms
Cocaine	Kilograms
Heroin	Kilograms
Methamphetamine/Amphetamine	Various
Other Categories ³	Various
Firearms and Explosives	
Legal Firearms	Number
Illegal Firearms	Number
Ammunition	Rounds
Explosives	Number
Counterfeit	
Currency - Completed (U.S. & Foreign)	Number of counterfeit bills
Credit Cards	Number
Other (e.g., other counterfeit monetary instruments)	Number

Note: This is not intended to be an all-inclusive list. Other categories should be considered as appropriate.

³Other categories include material amounts of other drugs seized, to be separately reported by liquid weight, dry weight, tablets, or other appropriate measurement.

Appendix A: Glossary

See Consolidated Glossary in “Appendix E: Consolidated Glossary.”