



**LESSONS LEARNED FROM COUNTY COVID LOANER LAPTOP PURCHASES**

**COVID LOANER LAPTOP  
COMPUTERS**

Starting on March 20, 2020, County employees who could perform their job duties remotely were mandated by the Chief Administrative Officer to work remotely until further notice. In response, the County took steps to provide affected employees with laptop computers and other equipment.

The County’s Office of Device Client Management (DCM), which already had a functioning program to loan laptop computers to employees on a short term basis for business travel, presentations, special events, work assignments, and work at remote locations, subsequently made their inventory available to aid in the transition to mandatory telework.

DCM was also instructed by the County Executive’s Office to procure more laptops as needed to meet the demand. These additional computers were referred to as “COVID loaner laptops”.

**COVID LOANER LAPTOPS  
PURCHASED AS OF  
SEPTEMBER 9, 2020**

Laptops purchased: 643  
Cost: \$643,711

The Montgomery County Office of the Inspector General (OIG) initiated a review of Montgomery County’s purchase of laptop computers to support a mandatory telework order by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). We sought to determine whether adequate controls were in place during the acquisition, deployment, and subsequent maintenance of the purchased computers.

**RECOMMENDED ENHANCEMENTS**

- Develop policies to address the acquisition, control, and distribution of IT equipment in emergency situations
- Make purchasing decisions based on identified needs to prevent waste
- Develop a plan to incorporate COVID laptops into the County’s inventory
- Improve inventory control processes
- Enhance warehouse operations and security

**DEVELOP POLICIES TO ADDRESS THE ACQUISITION, CONTROL, AND DISTRIBUTION OF IT EQUIPMENT IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS**

The COVID pandemic overwhelmed many County programs and services. The move to expanded telework exposed shortages in equipment and deficiencies in policy to address the emergent situation.

DCM’s purchase and subsequent dispersal of laptops to support telework revealed a lack of clear procurement and inventory control policies. DCM should develop policies for the acquisition, control, and distribution of information technology equipment in response to emergency conditions. Contingency planning for such situations can help reduce waste and mismanagement while minimizing delays in providing critical services.

# LESSONS LEARNED FROM COUNTY COVID LOANER LAPTOP PURCHASES

## MAKE PURCHASING DECISIONS BASED ON IDENTIFIED NEEDS TO PREVENT WASTE

The County Executive's Office gave DCM approval to purchase up to 100 COVID loaner laptops per month on an as needed basis to fulfill requests. Between March 23 and September 9, 2020, DCM purchased 643 computers through eight separate transactions. During a site visit to the DCM warehouse in September we found approximately 100 laptops in inventory and an additional 200 in transit from vendors.

Through our review, we observed that DCM did not have a consistent method for identifying needs prior to making purchases.

DCM should develop a process for identifying actual or projected needs and use the resulting information as the basis of purchasing decisions. Making purchasing decisions without having identified a specific need can lead to waste and abuse of County resources.

## DEVELOP A PLAN TO INCORPORATE COVID LAPTOPS INTO THE COUNTY'S INVENTORY

We determined that DCM does not have a plan to retrieve and incorporate into operational inventory the approximately 643 laptop computers purchased to support COVID situational telework. The absence of a predetermined strategy could lead to loss, theft, misuse, and waste.

DCM should develop policies and procedures for retrieving deployed COVID loaner laptops and incorporating them into the operational inventory for use in normal County operations. DCM's procedures should address timeframe constraints, warranty status, replacement lifecycles, accountability, inventory controls, and communication to departments, agencies, and employees.

## IMPROVE INVENTORY CONTROL PROCESSES

DCM is charged with maintaining an accurate inventory of all County IT assets. During our review, we found that DCM could not provide complete records showing the location and assigned user of all COVID loaner laptops. We further found that they did not have a policy requiring a physical inventory of all assets stored in the warehouse.

DCM tracks and updates asset locations, statuses, and user assignments through data received from IT Help Desk calls and information provided by the multiple IT sections within individual County departments. These methods do not provide all the information required to maintain complete inventory records and ensure proper accountability.

DCM should strengthen existing policies and develop new procedures to improve inventory controls to ensure better accountability of County IT assets. Policies should include a requirement to conduct periodic physical inventories that compare physical counts to inventory system records, and routine reconciliations with Department IT

## ENHANCE WAREHOUSE OPERATIONS AND SECURITY

During our visits to the DCM warehouse we observed boxes of computer equipment stacked approximately six feet high and clusters of computer equipment scattered around the warehouse in a haphazard fashion. We also noted extremely deficient security practices.

Operating a disorderly warehouse with faulty security can lead to damage, loss, theft, and misuse of County IT equipment. DCM should implement enhanced warehouse management practices and immediately bolster security protocols to improve accountability and prevent the abuse of County IT equipment.

## REPORT FRAUD, WASTE, AND ABUSE



[ig@montgomerycountymd.gov](mailto:ig@montgomerycountymd.gov)



<http://montgomerycountymd.gov/oig/hotline.html>



240-777-7OIG (7644)

