

DefenseNews

May 13-19, 2002

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Commentary

EDITORIALS

PENTAGON PROCUREMENT

Play Fair

In the past decade, billions of dollars in U.S. military contracts have flowed to companies that repeatedly broke federal laws and regulations, according to a new report by the independent Project on Government Oversight (POGO) in Washington.

No doubt some of the violations are inadvertent. The labyrinth of rules that govern Pentagon purchasing is a recipe for mistakes, and the U.S. government should continue its efforts to streamline those regulations.

But it is equally certain that some of the offenses were willfully committed by firms that did not sufficiently fear punishment.

Allowing some companies to play by different rules does no one any benefit. Favoritism locks out potential competitors, all but guaranteeing higher prices and poorer service for the taxpayers' money.

A good first fix is to create a central place to track such violations. It took a year for POGO researchers to compile their list, using Freedom of Information Act requests, visits to document storage facilities and painstaking searches through agency and judicial records.

In the age of e-mail and the World Wide Web, it should not be so hard for regulators and taxpayers to keep track of who's not playing fair.