

Tuesday, August 9, 2005

Make up your own joke

The state has 'misplaced' 30,000 vehicles

Where is the state hiding 30,000 of its government vehicles?

Out of 70,000 state-owned vehicles, only about 40,000 can be accounted for, reported the Aug. 8 Los Angeles Daily News. The tally comes after "an aggressive new asset-management push" by Gov. Schwarzenegger's State and Consumer Services Agency "which began its review when he took office," according to the Daily News. This is part of an agency push "to maximize resources, improve efficiency and reduce government spending."

What a desk-pounder. How can the state "lose" 30,000 vehicles, especially at a time when the government continues to run structural budget deficits? We're not talking a couple missing hubcaps here.

Assets can't be managed if the managers don't know where they are, how many there are and their usage and operational costs.

"The vehicles are out there. There probably are people who can tell you where they are," Steven Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of state and local Government at Claremont McKenna College, told us.

"The core problem is getting what I call 'key decision-making information,'" he said. "In a well-run organization, that information is available to the decision-makers" as they compare and evaluate costs among departments.

In this case, the decision-makers are the governor, members of his cabinet, legislators and, of course, citizens. The Daily News noted that legislation signed by Gov. Gray Davis in 2003 and Gov. Schwarzenegger in 2004 is supposed to make it easier to gather information about state assets and increase accountability. Clearly, more work needs to be done in these areas.

"Good enough for government work" is no excuse for Enron-style accounting that "hides" 30,000 vehicles.