

Buying from government surplus auctions

US federal and state surplus programs sell vehicles, equipment and seized or surplus property to the public through online auctions and contracted auction houses.

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When a government no longer needs something - a truck, a forklift, a pallet of laptops, office furniture, sometimes boats, aircraft or real estate - it sells it. Federal agencies, states, counties, cities, schools and police departments all run surplus programs. These sales are open to the public and often carry no buyer's premium, which is why fleet buyers and resellers watch them closely. USA.gov's buying-from-government guide is the federal starting point and explains the difference between surplus property and seized property.

Federal surplus

The General Services Administration sells federal surplus personal property through GSA Auctions, an online platform covering everything from office equipment and vehicles to jewelry. Registration is free, bidding is online, and each sale's terms set the payment rules. Surplus federal real property sells under separate invitations for bids - sealed-bid sales - rather than the online platform. Some federal programs are not public sales at all: donation programs move property to states, which pass it on to eligible agencies and nonprofits.

State surplus programs

Every state runs a surplus program, and this directory lists the ones with a public page. The shapes differ:

- New York's Office of General Services sells surplus vehicles and highway equipment through the GovDeals marketplace.
- North Carolina's State Surplus Property Agency sells through a Raleigh warehouse open to the public and through online auctions; the agency accepts cards, cashier's checks and money orders, and has announced cash will no longer be accepted from January 2027.
- The Texas Facilities Commission runs a retail store in Austin selling surplus state goods and abandoned airport items, with online auctions on Public Surplus and GovDeals.
- California's Department of General Services runs the California Surplus Property System for online auction of state property and separate public vehicle auctions.
- Florida's Department of Management Services sends surplus vehicles and mobile equipment to public auctions run by Tampa Machinery Auction and the Public Surplus marketplace.

The marketplaces

Much state and local surplus does not move through a government-run shop at all. Agencies post their assets on marketplaces - GovDeals, Public Surplus, PropertyRoom for police

property - and the marketplace's own terms apply to the sale. GovDeals, for example, adds a buyer's premium when an agency shows one on the auction's bid box; a common published rate is 12.5% of the final selling price.

How to bid

1. Find the program in the directory and open the marketplace or portal named on the listing.
2. Register a bidder account; it is usually free, but read the terms before you click.
3. Inspect the item where viewing days are offered. Surplus goods sell as-is, where-is, and a photo is not a condition report.
4. Bid, then pay inside the stated window - often about five business days - and collect within the collection deadline. Government auctions do not store your purchase.

One more check: surplus listings are honest about what is being sold, but "surplus" covers a tired fleet pickup and a nearly new one alike. The discount is real because the risk is real. Compare the asset to market prices before you decide what it is worth to you.

Frequently asked questions

Does a government auction charge a buyer's premium?

Sometimes. Many government sales charge none. Marketplaces like GovDeals add a premium only when the selling agency shows one on the auction page; a common published rate is 12.5% of the final selling price.

Can anyone bid at a government surplus auction?

Usually yes. Public sales are open to anyone who registers on the marketplace named in the listing. Some federal donation programs are restricted to government bodies and nonprofits.

How fast do I have to pay and collect?

Fast. GovDeals terms, for example, ask for full payment within 5 business days, with PayPal and cards limited to smaller amounts and wire transfer above them. Each sale's own terms state its deadline.

Sources

[USA.gov - Buying from the U.S. government](https://www.usa.gov/buy-from-government) — <https://www.usa.gov/buy-from-government>

[GSA - How to purchase surplus property](https://www.gsa.gov/buy-through-us/government-property-for-sale-or-lease/office-of-personal-property-management/for-citizens-seeking-surplus-property/how-to-purchase-surplus-property) — <https://www.gsa.gov/buy-through-us/government-property-for-sale-or-lease/office-of-personal-property-management/for-citizens-seeking-surplus-property/how-to-purchase-surplus-property>

[New York OGS - State surplus property program](https://ogs.ny.gov/state-surplus-property-program) — <https://ogs.ny.gov/state-surplus-property-program>

[North Carolina DOA - State surplus property](https://www.doa.nc.gov/divisions/state-surplus-property) — <https://www.doa.nc.gov/divisions/state-surplus-property>

[Texas Facilities Commission - State surplus store](https://web.tfc.texas.gov/public/state-surplus-store) — <https://web.tfc.texas.gov/public/state-surplus-store>

[California DGS - State surplus](https://www.dgs.ca.gov/OFAM/Surplus-Property-and-Reutilization/State-Surplus) — <https://www.dgs.ca.gov/OFAM/Surplus-Property-and-Reutilization/State-Surplus>

[Florida DMS - Surplus state vehicles and equipment auctions](https://www.dms.myflorida.com/business_operations/fleet_management_and_federal_property_assistance/fleet_management/surplus_state_vehicles_equipment_auctions) — https://www.dms.myflorida.com/business_operations/fleet_management_and_federal_property_assistance/fleet_management/surplus_state_vehicles_equipment_auctions

[GovDeals - Terms and conditions](https://www.govdeals.com/content/termsandconditions/1?companyName=GovDeals) — <https://www.govdeals.com/content/termsandconditions/1?companyName=GovDeals>

This guide is about United States.