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CLIENT ALERT

OIG Audit Report Recognizes Significant Strides in DOD's Use and Investment in Additive Manufacturing for Sustainment Parts

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On October 17, 2019, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for the Department of Defense (DoD) released a report on its "Audit of the DoD's Use of Additive Manufacturing for Sustainment Parts." The report defined additive manufacturing (AM) as creating "an object by adding layers of material from three-dimensional data, unlike traditional, or subtractive, manufacturing processes where the product is created by cutting away material from a larger piece. This process also includes 3-D printing." The OIG audit examined the DoD's use of AM for replacement parts for existing weapon systems, or sustainment parts, noting that it could involve the use of various materials, including plastics, metals, and ceramics.

Since the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 "strongly encouraged" the DoD to invest in AM, the DoD has prioritized using and investing in AM. In its report, the OIG recognized that the DoD has made some significant strides to lower the cost and increase the efficiency of manufacturing sustainment parts by using AM. Specifically, the OIG found that the DoD has "implemented policy and established multiple working groups to coordinate efforts between the Military Services and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA)." The OIG further found that DoD has used AM to make thousands of parts and tools in at least 81 Military Service depots, maintenance facilities, and field locations. Additionally, the OIG recognized that multiple DoD offices have been leading the DoD's AM efforts: the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and DLA, all of which have significantly invested in AM technology. In one example, the report noted that the Navy was able to reduce the time it took to receive an MH-60R sonar system cover from two years to one week just by using AM rather than traditional manufacturing techniques.

To develop further efficiencies and build on this progress, the audit report made four recommendations to continue to enhance the DoD's investment in and use of AM. Specifically, the OIG recommended that the DoD: (1) standardize data for AM parts and ensure consistent production and reporting requirements; (2) implement a method for sharing data on AM parts across departments; (3) compile a list of parts manufactured using AM and those waiting for approval to be shared across departments and update the list as necessary; and (4) identify staffing and funding necessary to accomplish AM initiatives. The OIG anticipates that adopting these recommendations will help the DoD save money and improve its readiness. Government contractors should expect increased demands from the DoD to transition from traditional manufacturing techniques to AM as it continues to expand its preference for AM.

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