



Fact Sheet

Public Affairs Division - Washington DC



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eTRACE: INTERNET-BASED FIREARMS TRACING AND ANALYSIS

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) is the federal agency that is authorized by Congress to stem firearms-related violent crime and to regulate the firearms industry in America. ATF's National Tracing Center (NTC) assists domestic and international law enforcement agencies by tracing the origin of firearms that have been recovered in criminal investigations.

Firearms tracing through eTrace is the systematic tracking of a recovered firearm from its manufacturer or importer and subsequent introduction into the distribution chain (wholesaler/retailer) to the first retail purchase. A firearms trace is conducted when a law enforcement agency recovers a firearm at a crime scene and requests information regarding its origin to develop investigative leads. That information is used to link a suspect to a firearm in a criminal investigation, to identify potential traffickers, and when sufficient comprehensive tracing is undertaken in a given community, to detect interstate, intrastate, and international patterns regarding the sources and types of crime guns.

Pursuant to the Gun Control Act of 1968, ATF is the sole federal agency that is authorized to conduct firearms tracing. The NTC is authorized to trace a firearm for a law enforcement agency that is involved in a bona fide criminal investigation.

ATF's eTrace is a paperless firearms trace request submission system and interactive trace analysis module that facilitates firearms tracing and assists ATF's efforts to combat firearms trafficking. eTrace provides the electronic exchange of crime gun incident data in a Web-based environment with a portal to the Firearms Tracing System (FTS) database. The system provides real-time capabilities that allow law enforcement agencies to submit electronic firearms trace requests, monitor the progress of traces, retrieve completed trace results and query firearms trace-related data in the FTS database.

In addition, registered users are able to initiate a search on virtually any data field or combination of data elements such as firearms serial numbers, an individual's name, type of crime, date of recovery, or other identifiers. Registered users also can generate statistical reports on the number of traces submitted, the top firearms traced, the average time-to-crime rates, and other variables.

The benefits of eTrace include the ability to (1) develop investigative leads; (2) significantly reduce the turnaround time required to process a trace request; (3) improve quality of trace related information because of real-time data validation; (4) monitor the status of traces; (5) view/print/download completed trace results; and (6) generate statistical reports and perform online analytical research.

The eTrace system allows a law enforcement agency to conduct comprehensive traces of recovered crime guns and establish an information platform for developing the best investigative strategies to reduce firearms-related crime and violence. The application is available 24 hours per day/seven days per week and is provided free of charge to authorized law enforcement agencies. Each participating law enforcement agency must sign a memorandum of understanding with ATF.

Distribution of eTrace to the law enforcement community began in January 2005. To date, more than 5,080 U.S. law enforcement agencies and 41 foreign countries actively use eTrace in their investigative work. The NTC processed more than 340,000 trace requests in fiscal year 2013.

In December 2009, ATF released eTrace 4.0, the bilingual version of the application allowing law enforcement agencies to capitalize on the full benefits of eTrace in English or Spanish. The new software is an enhancement of the original English-only version and provides Spanish-speaking countries a full language translation capability that increases the ease of use of this pivotal crime fighting tool. In the past, the NTC conducted firearms tracing for foreign governments in a time consuming, manual process. The 4.0 eTrace software, produced at the request of Spanish-speaking countries, allows users to input and retrieve data in Spanish and, at the same time, the information will also be retrievable and searchable in English. It also allows international law enforcement agencies to capitalize on the full benefits of eTrace in Spanish or English and provides data conventions in accordance with international standards.

Foreign countries currently using eTrace include: Albania, Anguilla, Antigua, Aruba, Australia, the Commonwealth of the Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Canada, Cayman Islands, Colombia, Costa Rica, Curacao, Czech Republic, Dominica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Finland, Germany, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Japan, Kosovo, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Slovakia, Spain, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and the United Kingdom.

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