



## Fact Sheet



Public Affairs Division - Washington DC

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### **NATIONAL TRACING CENTER (NTC)**

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) National Tracing Center (NTC) is the country's only crime gun tracing facility. As such, the NTC provides critical information that helps domestic and international law enforcement agencies solve firearms crimes, detect firearms trafficking, and track the intrastate, interstate, and international movement of crime guns.

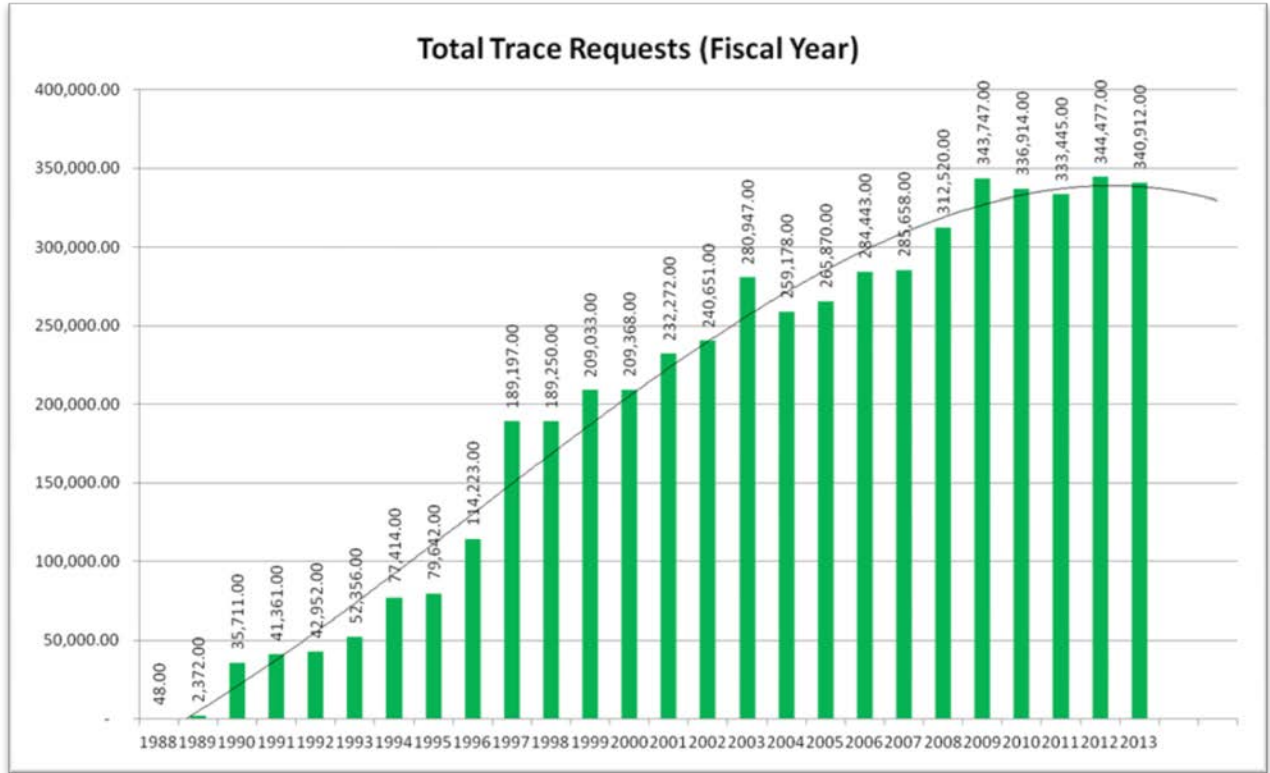
Pursuant to the Gun Control Act of 1968, ATF is the sole federal agency that is authorized to administer firearms tracing. The NTC is authorized to trace a firearm for a law enforcement agency involved in a bona fide criminal investigation. Several programs within the NTC receive, manage, and disseminate firearms information in conjunction with firearms tracing to support the international law enforcement community in the effort to combat violent crime and firearms trafficking.

NTC's mission is to accurately and efficiently conduct firearms tracing and related programs to provide investigative leads for federal, state, local and foreign law enforcement agencies.

The NTC processed more than 340,000 trace requests in fiscal year 2013. The goal of the NTC is to complete traces classified as "Urgent" in less than 24 hours. Traces classified as "Routine" are completed within five days on average. The law enforcement agency submitting the trace request determines the trace classification.

Firearms tracing begins when a law enforcement agency discovers a firearm at a crime scene and seeks to learn the origin or background of that firearm in order to develop investigative leads. Tracing is a systematic process of tracking the movement of a firearm from its manufacture or from its introduction into U.S. commerce by the importer through the distribution chain, i.e., wholesaler/retailer to the first retail purchaser. That information can help to link a suspect to a firearm in a criminal investigation and identify potential traffickers. Firearms tracing can detect in-state, interstate and international patterns in the sources and types of crime guns. ATF processes crime-gun trace requests for thousands of domestic and international law enforcement agencies each year. ATF traces U.S.-sourced firearms recovered in foreign countries for law enforcement agencies in those countries.

In fiscal years 1988 through 2013 the NTC conducted traces as outlined on the graph below:



**eTrace 4.0:**

This web-based, bi-lingual (English and Spanish) firearms tracing system is available to accredited domestic and international law enforcement agencies to assist in the tracing of U.S.-sourced firearms. eTrace is a paperless firearms trace request submission system and an interactive firearms trace analysis tool that provides an electronic exchange of crime gun incident-based data in a secure web-based environment. Through eTrace, law enforcement agencies can electronically submit firearms trace requests, monitor the progress of traces, retrieve completed trace results, and query firearms trace-related data. eTrace includes analytical and download capabilities for ATF's firearms trace information, including selective field searches and statistical reporting.

eTrace has registered more than 5,000 law enforcement agencies, including agencies in 41 foreign countries. The eTrace system currently has more than 33,500 individual law enforcement user accounts. International tracing supports joint law enforcement projects through programs such as the Southwest Border Initiative and the Caribbean Community Initiative.

**Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL) Theft/Loss Program:**

FFLs are required by law to report to ATF the theft or loss of firearms inventory within 48 hours of discovery.

The NTC receives these reports from FFLs. The NTC is able to develop

investigative leads when any of these firearms is subsequently recovered and traced by law enforcement. Each year, thousands of firearms are reported as lost or stolen.

**Interstate Theft Program:**

The NTC maintains the Interstate Theft Program. The NTC manages reports of theft or loss of firearms from interstate shipments by interstate carriers. Interstate carriers can make such reports on a voluntary basis (it is not a mandatory legal requirement). The NTC provides a standard form and process by which the shipper, carrier, and/or consignee can report such losses. Under the program, hundreds of reports of thefts and losses from interstate shipments are received, managed, and disseminated to ATF offices around the country for investigation each year. Further, the NTC is able to develop investigative leads when a firearm reported stolen or lost is recovered and traced by law enforcement.

**Obliterated Serial Number Program:**

ATF provides serialization and other firearms identification forensics expertise to assist in the positive identification of firearms when serial numbers have been partially obliterated or have been partially restored. ATF's Obliterated Serial Number Program allows law enforcement agencies to identify recovered firearms whose origins have been masked by serial number destruction or alteration. ATF uses the recovery information to identify firearms trafficking patterns and related crimes.

**Out-of-Business Records:**

Federal firearms licensees (FFLs) that discontinue business are required by law to send all firearms transaction records to the NTC. Out-of-business records are integral in the firearms tracing process. The NTC receives an average of 1.2 million out-of-business records per month. Since 1968, ATF has received several hundred million such records. ATF's Out-of-Business Records repository is the only one of its kind in the world.

**Records Search Requests:**

ATF utilizes out-of-business FFL records to assist in the investigation of firearm thefts when incomplete identifying information is available. ATF receives thousands of such requests each year from law enforcement jurisdictions where an individual firearm owner has no record of the firearms identifiers and the FFL from whom the owner purchased the firearm is no longer in business. These records have proved pivotal in other criminal investigations.

**Multiple Sales Programs:**

FFLs are required by statute to report to ATF the sale of two or more handguns to the same purchaser within five consecutive business days. These reports, when cross-referenced with crime gun trace information, serve as an important indicator in the detection of illegal firearms trafficking. They can also allow successful tracing of older firearms that have re-entered the retail market.

The NTC is located in Martinsburg, W.Va., approximately 90 miles from Washington, D.C. The facility houses ATF's Firearms Technology Branch (which

includes ATF's Firearms Reference Library), the Federal Firearms Licensing Center, the Federal Explosives Licensing Center, the National Firearms Act Branch, the Imports Branch, the Brady Operations Branch, and the Violent Crime Analysis Branch.

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