



NIBIN News:

Resolution of Returned Firearms Issue



NIBIN Branch, Firearms Programs Division, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms
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This is an update for NIBIN Partners currently using IBIS equipment about the resolution of an important correlation issue. At some IBIS sites, firearms which have been seized, testfired and entered into IBIS can then leave law enforcement custody and return to public circulation, through return to rightful owner, auction, or return of firearms held for safekeeping. However, the current IBIS correlation default assumes that a testfired firearm will not return to public circulation and therefore will never match against future assault/homicide crimes occurring after the firearm's entry. This is true of both bullet and cartridge case entries. This situation has produced concern that some testfired firearms could be used in future crimes and yet be untraceable through IBIS.

To overcome this concern, some sites began entering TESTFIRES using the event type OTHER. FTI studied this protocol change, and determined that it was not an effective solution and could in fact impair operation of the IBIS system. Entering testfires as OTHER increases the number of records included in each search; as a result, searches require additional correlation time, and search results are less accurate.

The issue has been under discussion by ATF, FTI, and a representative group of NIBIN users for the past 12 months. During the Florida International Association for Identification (IAI) conference last November, a solution was agreed upon. The following short and long-term solutions are being implemented:

Short-term solution (until the release of an upcoming IBIS version):

- Users will identify new firearm exhibits as TESTFIRE and not OTHER.
- FTI will be contacting selected sites in order to convert previously acquired firearm exhibits from OTHER to TESTFIRE.
- Users will perform a manual correlation whenever it is deemed necessary to correlate a recent assault or homicide against previously entered firearms.

Long-term solution (with the release of an upcoming IBIS version):

- Users will continue to classify new firearm exhibits as TESTFIRE.
- The first automatic correlation will search against any unsolved assaults or homicides prior to the date the evidence was taken into custody – as per the current configuration.
- A new second automatic correlation allows searching against other testfires taken into police custody up to three years prior. A match in the second correlation represents an assault or homicide exhibit matching against a firearm previously entered into IBIS.
- IBIS sites that are not exposed to this situation would not be affected (the new feature would be optional and pre-configured by FTI).

After the installation of the upcoming software version, FTI can then accommodate sites that presently do not want to perform manual correlations as a short-term solution by means of initiating correlations retroactively using the new second correlation feature. In order to avoid detrimental impact to the IBIS system, ATF and FTI should validate operational changes or modifications in IBIS operational procedures or protocols before implementation.

The successful resolution of this issue demonstrates that constructive input from NIBIN Partners strengthens the NIBIN program and improves IBIS functionality. If you have any concerns or questions, please call the NIBIN program office at 202-927-5660, or send an email to atfnibin@atfhq.atf.treas.gov.