

provided for the participating sites. However, preliminary research by the NTC in selected communities indicates that between 9 percent and 20 percent of recovered firearms have their serial numbers obliterated. NTC analysis indicates that *a very high percentage of firearms with obliterated serial numbers were originally purchased as part of a multiple sale and then illegally trafficked*. Restoration of obliterated serial numbers is often possible by either ATF or police department laboratories. Restoration of these serial numbers and tracing of the firearm should be given high priority.

**Preventing trafficking in new firearms to youths and juveniles.** Crime gun tracing is identifying many investigative opportunities for enforcement officials. The fact that many young people are using relatively new firearms, purchased from Federal firearms licensees that are maintaining records, provides significant opportunities for

enforcement agencies to identify illegal traffickers. Project LEAD and trace analyses can facilitate the investigation, arrest, and prosecution of illegal suppliers of these crime guns.

**Preventing trafficking of older firearms.** Preventing the trafficking of older firearms requires a different approach. Older firearms enter the illegal market through several routes: they are sold by federally licensed gun dealers as used firearms, they are sold as used firearms on the legal secondary market (i.e., private sales exempt from federal regulation), they are stolen and resold through gun traffickers, or they are stolen personally by the crime gun possessor. Finding the source of older guns requires, in addition to crime gun tracing, debriefing of arrestees associated with crime guns and investigation into the chain of transfers of the crime gun beyond the first retail purchaser.

## Future Crime Gun Trace Analysis Techniques

The ATF National Tracing Center is continuing to develop new techniques to analyze crime gun traces. These will further increase the ability of enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute illegal traffickers. Future developments will include the following:

**Reporting on crime guns with obliterated serial numbers that cannot be restored.** The NTC has established a data base for crime guns for which serial numbers have been obliterated and cannot be restored. Collection of this information is critical to the NTC's efforts to report on crime gun trafficking.

**Improvements in Project LEAD.** Project LEAD, ATF's illegal firearms trafficking information system, is being improved to add indicators that will suggest new types of leads to trafficking investigators. In addition, special agents will be able to access Project LEAD in real time.

**Reports on multiple purchases of crime guns by a single purchaser.** When a Federal firearms licensee sells two or more handguns in five business days to a single purchaser, the licensee must notify ATF of these sales in writing. ATF provides a multiple sales form to simplify this notification. Information supplied by Federal firearms licensees on multiple sales forms is integrated into Project LEAD for use in

illegal firearms trafficking investigations. In the future, information on crime gun traces associated with multiple purchases can be included in crime gun trace analysis reports.

**Reports on crime guns that possessors report to be stolen.** The submission of trace requests for firearms known by enforcement officials to have been stolen was inconsistent among participating sites. NTC procedures will be altered to permit accurate reporting of this information. Currently, less than 1 percent of all crime guns submitted for tracing to the NTC are reported to have been stolen.

**Use of a ballistics identification system to help identify firearms traffickers.** ATF has pioneered ballistics technology that allows enforcement agencies to link recovered bullets and cartridge cases with recovered crime guns. To facilitate identification of traffickers and other criminals, the ballistics data base and the NTC crime gun data base can be linked, and ballistics-related information can be captured in crime gun trace analyses.