

What This Report Contains

Information about *crime guns*. A *crime gun* is defined, for purpose of firearms tracing, as any firearm that is illegally possessed, used in a crime, or suspected by enforcement officials of being used in a crime. Report E shows the crime types most frequently associated with crime gun trace requests.

Comprehensive crime gun trace data by community. The report presents information about how many crime guns were submitted for tracing. Participants in the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative voluntarily agreed to trace *all* crime guns recovered in their jurisdiction. Police departments are not required by Federal law to maintain or supply crime gun recovery information and have not historically submitted all crime guns for tracing. Lack of comprehensive tracing has precluded certain kinds of crime gun analyses since there may not have been enough crime gun trace requests from particular jurisdictions to identify community-wide patterns. The voluntary tracing agreement under this initiative was intended to overcome this problem.

Information from *National Tracing Center traces*. The information in this report is derived from data contained in requests for crime gun traces that enforcement agencies submitted to ATF's National Tracing Center (NTC) and from the results of traces that the NTC conducts. An *NTC trace* uses records maintained and made available by the firearms industry to identify the history of a firearm's ownership. A *successful NTC trace* describes firearm ownership from the manufacturer or importer through the wholesaler to the first known retail dealer. Depending on the investigative circumstances, the NTC trace may also identify the first retail purchaser, and sometimes even subsequent purchasers. Because of the structure of Federal firearms regulation and recordkeeping requirements, however, it is generally not possible for the NTC to trace a crime gun beyond its first retail sale using firearms industry records. To further trace a crime gun's path, ATF must conduct an *investigative trace*, in which special agents investigate

the subsequent chain of possession. Investigative traces are extremely resource intensive and are generally conducted only where there is a specific investigative need.

Analyses of *requests for crime gun traces*.

The report contains certain analyses that are based on the information contained in *requests for crime gun traces*. These analyses do not depend on the NTC successfully completing the traces. Information available for all crime guns submitted for tracing, whether or not the crime gun is successfully traced by the NTC, includes the number of recovered crime guns in a community, the type of firearm (e.g., revolver, rifle), and its manufacturer and caliber.

Analyses of *successful NTC traces*. The report also contains certain analyses that are based on the results of *successful NTC traces*. Information available only for crime guns successfully traced by the NTC includes the time it takes for a crime gun to move from its last known retail sale to recovery by enforcement officials, and the State in which the crime gun was sold.

Analysis of *incomplete traces*. The report shows the number of successful NTC traces and explains why the NTC closed the remaining traces without a successful NTC trace. This information is intended to assist in increasing the number of successful NTC traces.

Analyses by *adult, youth, and juvenile age categories*. The report generally presents information in four age categories: adults (25 and over); youth (ages 18 through 24); juvenile (17 and under); and all age categories combined.

Crime gun trace information for a *10-month period*. The patterns depicted in this report are based on crime guns for which trace requests were submitted to the NTC during the period of July 1, 1996, through April 30, 1997. The NTC provided project training in August and September 1996; project tracing then began in all sites. Early trace requests may not include as complete information as later traces.