

5 - Progress and Plans: The Strategic Use of Crime Gun Information

This section describes the progress made in comprehensive crime gun tracing during the past year. Crime gun tracing is voluntary for most law enforcement agencies. Through the Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (YCGII) and other firearms enforcement programs, ATF in 1996 began a concerted effort to work with other law enforcement organizations to maximize the utility of this critical investigative tool. To develop and encourage crime gun tracing, ATF continues to strive to improve the tracing process, quantity, quality, and delivery of crime gun information, and related investigative services to ATF agents and their State and local partners.

5-1 Level and Quality of Crime Gun Tracing

Number of Crime Guns Traced. The number of firearm traces submitted to the National Tracing Center (NTC) remained relatively constant; from 206,070 traces in 1999 to 206,115 traces in 2000. Law enforcement officials in the 50 participating YCGII locations submitted approximately 96,902 crime gun trace requests between January 1, 2000, and December 31, 2000, 47 percent of the total number of crime gun trace requests submitted to the NTC during this period. The 17 new YCGII cities submitted 17,510 trace requests.

Comprehensive Crime Gun Tracing. Police departments that join the YCGII make a commitment to trace all crime guns recovered in their jurisdictions in order to maximize investigative leads and permit analysis of local crime gun patterns by age group. While other law enforcement agencies are making similar commitments and meeting them successfully, the annual Crime Gun Trace Reports currently include only YCGII cities. ATF makes a special effort to ensure the accuracy of the information collected for these reports. While the NTC cannot determine definitively whether all recovered crime guns are being traced, an evaluation can be made based on the number of trace requests, the tracing infrastructure in the law enforcement agencies, and on information obtained from local officials. On this basis, the NTC determined that during 2000, 38 of the 50 locations participating in YCGII were tracing comprehensively. These cities include:

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Atlanta, GA | Chicago, IL | Jacksonville, FL | New Orleans, LA | Richmond, VA |
| Baltimore, MD | Cincinnati, OH | Los Angeles, CA | Nashville, TN | Salinas, CA |
| Baton Rouge, LA | Dallas, TX | Louisville, KY | New York, NY | San Antonio, TX |
| Birmingham, AL | Gary, IN | Memphis, TN | Oklahoma City, OK | San Jose, CA |
| Boston, MA | Greensboro/Highpoint/ | Miami, FL | Philadelphia, PA | St. Louis, MO |
| Camden, NJ | Winston Salem, NC | Milwaukee, WI | Phoenix, AZ | Tampa, FL |
| Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC | Houston, TX | Minneapolis, MN | Pittsburgh, PA | Tucson, AZ |
| | Indianapolis, IN | Newark, NJ | Portland, OR | Washington, DC |

Of the remaining cities, a sufficient number of traces for a city-based analysis were received to complete a City Report. In each City Report, Table H reports each city's number of trace submissions.

Number of Completed Traces. The NTC is continually improving its ability to diagnose the reasons for missing crime gun trace information, to learn what type of crime gun information is most consistently missing or inaccurately reported and to determine whether the failure to match serial numbers is due to obliteration, faulty recording, incorrect Federal Firearms Licensee (FFL) records or data mismanagement. This effort is shown in Tables I and J of the City Reports and summarized here nationally for all YCGII cities with a population of over 250,000.

Increased FFL identification rate. Traces in which a Federal firearms licensee was identified accounted for 71 percent of crime gun traces initiated. This represents a decline from the 75 percent rate reported in the 1999 Crime Gun Trace Reports and an increase from the 66 percent rate reported in the 1998 Crime Gun Trace Reports.

Obstacles to identifying purchasers. As in 1999, the NTC identified retail purchasers for over half (53 percent, 47,478) YCGII crime guns. Where a trace was initiated by the NTC, purchasers were not identified for several reasons, including:

- problem with crime gun serial number (10.8 percent)
- records on this crime gun unavailable (6.8 percent)
- problem with importer name (5.6 percent)
- problem with manufacturer name (3.5 percent)
- records not available (1.5 percent)
- expiration of 20-year record retention requirement (2.4 percent)

Uninitiated traces. The NTC did not initiate a trace for 12.8 percent (11,320) of the trace requests, for several reasons, including:

- firearms manufactured before 1969 and not traceable through Out-of-Business records (8.8 percent)
- trace request submitted for informational purposes only (3.4 percent)
- other reasons (0.6 percent)

The initiation of 87 percent of the trace requests from YCGII jurisdictions is a slight decrease from 1999 (90 percent).

Other limitations. With sufficient information about the crime gun, the NTC can identify the firearms first retail purchaser. In most cases, it cannot identify retail purchasers of crime guns re-sold by FFLs as used guns, or of crime guns acquired as used guns from unlicensed sellers. As a result of the structure of the firearms laws, an NTC trace usually stops at the first retail purchase of the firearm recovered by law enforcement.

5-2 Investigative Support for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies

Crime Gun Analysis Branch Support. The NTC Crime Gun Analysis Branch (CGAB) has been increasingly active in responding to requests from law enforcement agencies for assistance in developing strategic overviews of the local crime gun problem and in law enforcement investigations and regulatory inspections. In 2000, the CGAB completed over 37 crime gun mapping requests, including 15 YCGII cities; 334 requests for crime gun trace information; 389 requests for queries of the Firearms Tracing System (FTS) concerning individuals; 1,162 requests for queries concerning FFLs and 96 proactive referrals to investigators on suspected firearms traffickers. CGAB also made 18 presentations in 2000 on crime gun trace analysis through crime gun mapping and Online LEAD and prepared the Crime Gun Trace Reports.

Field Resource: Online LEAD. Online LEAD is ATF's crime gun trafficking information tool. In 2000, the number of ATF investigators using Online LEAD increased to approximately 1,800 users. In November 1999, Online LEAD was deployed to all ATF field offices to enable ATF agents, inspectors, and local task force officers to access crime gun trace and related multiple sales information directly from their desktop computers using the ATF IntraWeb, with over 375 users from YCGII cities receiving access. ATF investigators in all locations can now access not only local but all nationwide crime gun information, facilitating regional and interstate investigations.

Training: Firearms Tracing and Illegal Trafficking Investigations. In 1999, ATF developed a training CD-ROM to help train Federal, State and local law enforcement officers participating in YCGII in firearms identification and tracing procedures. ATF field agents learned how to use the YCGII Instructor CD-ROM and then delivered it locally. Because of the important role of firearms trafficking investigations in the reduction of violent crime, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, in a program funded by the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, continued to provide training at the NTC for police departments interested in starting comprehensive crime gun tracing and trafficking enforcement programs.

Training: Restoration of Obliterated Serial Numbers. ATF continues to work with police departments and law enforcement laboratories to restore obliterated serial numbers on crime guns and to develop local coordinated enforcement efforts to trace and proactively target leads derived from recovered crime guns with obliterated serial numbers. ATF has developed a 3-day session of instructional and hands-on training for State and local investigators and firearm examiners covering the importance of restoring obliterated serial numbers and tracing those firearms. Eleven training sessions were held during this reporting period, four in YCGII cities with representatives from four additional YCGII cities in attendance.

5-3 Improvements in the Tracing Process and Tracing Support for State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies

Currently, a routine firearm trace takes an average of 12 business days to complete. Urgent traces are completed within 24 hours. In 2000, ATF continued to take steps to shorten the time it takes to complete a routine trace, and facilitate law enforcement agencies ability to submit and receive trace information.

Compared to 1999, however, there was an increase in the completion time of the tracing process. This increase can be attributed to a higher rate of successful traces through Out-of-Business records and greater attention to improving the quality of traces being submitted.

Access 2000: Firearms Industry Cooperation.

Access 2000 is an ATF produced system that allows a manufacturer, importer or wholesaler to download a subset of their firearms data into a stand-alone personal computer. ATF tracers can then dial up and query on a specific serial number in order to obtain a disposition on the firearm. Access 2000 also allows 24-hour access to manufacturer, importer or wholesaler records and is particularly useful for urgent traces. The system shortens the trace process from 1 to 3 days by eliminating the step of calling or faxing the manufacturer, importer or wholesaler and waiting for the results of the crime guns disposition, while also reducing firearms industry trace-related costs. In 2000, use of Access 2000 increased from 10 to 17 manufacturers and/or wholesalers, and now includes 10 manufacturers: Beretta U.S.A. Corp., H&R 1871 Inc., Smith & Wesson, Taurus, Heckler & Koch, Marlin, Mossberg, Colt, Remington Arms and Glock G.m.b.H.; and 7 major wholesalers: RSR Wholesale Guns, Davidsons Supply Company, Acusport, Ellett Brothers, Interarms, Ashland Shooting Supplies and Sports South. Valor Corporation, another major importer, allows queries of crime gun traces to be conducted via the Internet.

Multiple Sales Records and Crime Gun Tracing.

The NTC continues to use multiple sales records to speed crime gun tracing. FFLs are required by law to report multiple sales transactions of handguns and to forward those records to the NTC. To facilitate crime gun tracing, the NTC began maintaining multiple sales information in a Multiple Sales Database linked to the FTS. When a crime gun trace request is received, the serial number is entered into the FTS. If the serial number entered matches a serial number in the Multiple Sales Database, the crime gun trace request can be closed immediately with the multiple sales purchaser information without time-consuming telephone calls to FFLs. In 2000, approximately 3 percent (2,752) of YCGII traces were completed with purchaser information from a multiple sales transaction. Because the Multiple Sales Database was established in November 1998, and there may be a delay of several years before a crime gun is traced, the NTC anticipates resolving more traces through the multiple sales database in the future.

Out-of-Business Records Imaging and Crime Gun Tracing.

The NTC is also using FFL Out-of-Business records to speed crime gun tracing. When an FFL discontinues business, the FFL is required by law to forward business records within 30 days to the Out-of-Business Records Center (OBRC) located at the NTC. OBRC receives and microfilms the acquisition and disposition records and ATF Form 4473 from all firearm transactions completed by FFLs who have discontinued business. OBRC processed 48,345 firearm traces from January 1, 2000 to December 31, 2000. In this time period, over 14 percent of all crime gun traces were completed with information from an out-of-business dealer.

5-4 Future Developments

Investigative Tracing for Crime Guns. ATF encourages all YCGII cities to conduct investigative traces on all crime guns recovered from juveniles and youths up to age 21. Investigative traces go beyond the first retail purchaser through the chain of possession until the crime gun reaches its final possessor. After its initial retail purchase, a crime gun may be transferred repeatedly before being used in a crime. For instance, it may be re-sold by an unlicensed seller, stolen, and then re-sold to an FFL, and re-sold again. In an investigative trace, special agents attempt to track the full chain of possession to determine how the juvenile or youth obtained the firearm, to build a case against any illegal suppliers. Analysis of investigative trace information will increase our understanding of how prohibited and young people obtain crime guns.

Firearms Identification Guide. To address the problem of unsuccessful traces due to faulty information on the trace request form, the NTC has developed a CD-ROM for reference use by the law enforcement community in firearms identification. Volume I of this CD contains graphic illustrations, historical data, and specifications on the 20 most frequently traced firearms. Subsequent volumes will illustrate additional firearms until the goal of 100 of the top traced firearms has been achieved. The CD is intended to be a stand-alone reference and training aid that can be utilized by everyone from entry level personnel to senior investigators to crime laboratories.

Electronic Trace Submission (ETSS). ETSS Version 2.6 was released in fiscal year 2001. Currently, there are 167 Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies that have received ETSS training for the purpose of submitting firearms traces. The NTC currently receives approximately 61 percent of firearms trace data via electronic format.

Regional Crime Gun Centers. Three Regional Crime Gun Centers (RCGC) have been established to ensure 100% comprehensive tracing of all recovered crime guns. The purpose of the RCGC is to analyze patterns and trends on a local level that can be detected through comprehensive trace information on

recovered crime guns. Equipped with the best technological hardware and research software available, the RCGC is staffed with ATF personnel as well as State and local investigators and analysts in order to analyze patterns and trends, develop investigative leads to stop the flow of crime guns into the communities and to assist the State and local police departments in the allocation of their resources. New York, Chicago and Washington D.C. are the first cities to utilize this concept on a local level. Combined, the cities have analyzed over 12,477 firearms and developed 361 investigative leads. More than 39 percent of the leads generated have involved over 20 different States. Los Angeles is the only RCGC site planned for the upcoming year. ATF is currently developing technology that would greatly enhance the development of future RCGC sites nationwide, as well as allowing quicker access to crime gun trace information by State and local investigative agencies.

National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN). ATF has successfully integrated its expertise in the regulation of the firearms industry and the effective enforcement of the Federal firearms laws with technological advances in the forensic ballistics examination field. This unique program uses all of the resources that ATF has to offer in working with our law enforcement counterparts to reduce violent firearms violence.

Just as each fingerprint is different, a firearm leaves unique, identifiable characteristics on expelled ammunition. ATF's NIBIN Program employs the Integrated Ballistics Identification System to compare images of ballistic evidence (projectiles and shell casings) obtained from crime scenes and recovered firearms. As new images are entered, the system searches the existing data base for possible matches that must be confirmed by a firearms examiner. As a result, the system has amassed a large ballistics image data base filled with crime gun data from all over the country from which Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies may obtain intelligence information.

With this program, ATF has created a national resource that enables participating law enforcement agencies to store shooting-related data and test-fire exemplars from recovered firearms in one common system capable of performing comparisons and producing probable matches. Also, ATF has developed a mechanism to serve as a repository for all crime gun data that parallels the Automated Fingerprint Analysis System maintained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Automated ballistic technology is one more weapon in the arsenal of resources that ATF maintains to assist our partners.

YCGII Contract Support. To enhance the quality and efficiency of firearm trace submissions, the National Tracing Center supports a program to place retired law enforcement officers in strategic locations around the country to assist comprehensive tracing efforts. Retired ATF agents and State/local law enforcement officers knowledgeable in firearms identification and nomenclature have been contracted to secure and transmit pertinent firearms trace data to the NTC. Currently, 23 contracted analysts and data entry clerks have been retained for this task. This program is expected to expand in an effort to ease the tracing burden on law enforcement agencies.