
ATF Programs and Initiatives

Federal Firearms and Explosives Law Enforcement

Integrated Violence Reduction Strategy (IVRS) Program Components

Armed Violent Criminal Apprehension Program. One component of the IVRS (see page 7) is the Armed Violent Criminal Apprehension Program. This program seeks to identify, investigate, and recommend the prosecution of a wide range of firearms offenders: career criminals who use firearms, individuals who are actively involved in armed violent criminal activities or armed drug trafficking, and other categories of prohibited persons in possession of firearms (e.g., convicted felons, fugitives from justice, illegal aliens, and individuals convicted of certain domestic violence misdemeanors or subject to certain domestic violence restraining orders).

Youth Crime Gun Interdiction Initiative (YCGII). Under YCGII, ATF identifies and investigates illegal sources of firearms trafficked or diverted to youths and juveniles. This program requires a commitment on the part of participating jurisdictions to request traces for all crime guns recovered in their area and, if possible, to identify the date of birth of the possessor. The first goal of YCGII is to find patterns to aid law enforcement in working to keep guns out of the hands of our Nation's youth.

This initiative began in 1996 with 17 cities accounting for approximately 20,000 trace requests. Presently, this initiative has grown to 60 cities and accounts for 96,902 firearms traces.

Illegal Firearms Trafficking Enforcement Program. ATF identifies and investigates illegal firearms traffickers and the diversion of firearms out of lawful commerce and into the hands of criminals. Crime gun trace data shows that there are geographic "market areas" where crime guns are recovered and "source areas" that provide firearms to those markets. In these cases, investigative techniques vary depending on whether the agent is in a market or source area. In either case, firearms trafficking investigations can be complex and time consuming. They can involve illegal second-party purchases of firearms for those unable to legally possess firearms (with or without the complicity of a licensee), illegal dealing at gun shows or other locations, robberies of gun stores, and thefts from interstate shipments. More than 900 ATF defendants were sentenced in cases involving firearms trafficking in FY 2003.

Special agents receive several weeks of training in all aspects of firearms investigation during basic training. They may enhance this expertise by attending advanced firearms trafficking courses. Agents have access to an array of assets to support trafficking investigations, including Federal Firearms License (FFL) records, multiple handgun sales information, crime gun trace data, and Online LEAD analysis.

Internationally, ATF works with other agencies to prevent firearms from reaching the hands of drug traffickers, organized crime members, and terrorist organizations. ATF enforces provisions of the AECA, has primary jurisdiction over firearms and ammunition imports, and has shared jurisdiction of firearms exports with the United States Department of Commerce and the Department of State's Office of Munitions Control.

Firearms Tracing. The National Tracing Center (NTC) is the only operation of its kind in the world. This facility conducts traces of firearms

recovered at crime scenes and from youth for any Federal, State, local, or international law enforcement agency. The specific goal of the NTC is to increase the number of trace requests via increased electronic access to NTC information. In addition, the NTC is the only repository for all Federal firearms licensees' out-of-business records, where millions of records are stored.

Continuing ATF's partnership with the firearms industry, the NTC has 39 firearm manufacturers and wholesalers who provide the NTC online access to records through ACCESS 2000, which was utilized during the process of at least part of 76,788 traces.

The NTC provides ATF personnel and other law enforcement agencies with crime gun data specific to their geographic areas. During fiscal year 2003, the NTC completed 6,380 requests. This included the following:

- 60 Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping projects completed for the field and State and local police departments.
- 33 trace studies.
- 2,378 FFL and individual histories. ATF agents and inspectors use this information when planning or conducting compliance inspections of firearms licensees.
- Approximately 353 proactive referrals of investigation regarding potential firearms trafficking cases. Of the referrals initiated, 69 have resulted in an active ATF investigation.
- Approximately 20 Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) data extracts for various locations throughout the United States. Field personnel in conjunction with Prosecuting Attorneys utilize these data extracts to identify potential firearms traffickers and to conduct hot spot analysis.
- In excess of 200 requests for crime gun and multiple sales statistics pertaining to various locations throughout the United States and internationally. The statistics provided include the Top Firearms Traced, Top Crimes, Time-to-Crime, Total Number of Traces, Average Age of Possessor, Source and Target States, and Top Source Dealers.

The NTC also provided technical training to contract field Youth Crime Gun Analysts, which enabled them to analyze and evaluate the crime gun trace data and multiple sales data for their jurisdiction, allowing the analyst to identify trends and patterns and potential firearms traffickers.

National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act (Brady Act) requires a National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) for the purchase of every firearm from a Federal firearms licensee. While the NICS record check process is performed by the FBI, ATF investigates and enforces Brady Act violations. Under 18 U.S.C. § 922(t), with limited exceptions, a licensee is prohibited from transferring a firearm to an unlicensed person unless the licensee contacts the NICS system and receives a response that he may proceed or receives no response and three days have elapsed since contacting the system. During FY 2003, ATF received 64,336 Brady NICS referrals, resulting in 9,787 field investigations.

Firearms and Explosives Licenses, Inspection, and Investigation

Firearms Licensing. ATF is responsible for enforcing the Federal laws pertaining to Federal firearms and explosives. The Gun Control Act of 1968 mandates that every manufacturer, importer, or dealer in firearms obtain a Federal firearms license. Applicants submit their application forms, with all required information, to the National Licensing Center (NLC), which is responsible for actual license issuance. ATF conducts an applicant inspection to explain the Federal firearms laws and regulations and determine if the applicant is eligible for a license prior to its issuance. When an inspection reveals that the applicant is not eligible for a Federal firearms license, then the NLC denies the application and refunds the application fee payment. Inspectors also make referrals to the appropriate regulatory agency such as a zoning, occupancy, fire code,

or law enforcement agency when an inspection reveals conflicts with State laws and local ordinances. There are approximately 104,000 Federal firearm licensees.

Ongoing Licensee Inspections. Once a licensee is engaged in business, inspectors ensure that licensee's compliance with Federal laws and specific record keeping regulations. ATF enforces the licensing provisions of the Gun Control Act of 1968 by conducting on-premises inspections, including focused inspections on problem areas throughout the United States. Inspections of firearm licensees focus on ensuring that firearms are properly accounted for and that licensees are complying with legal and regulatory requirements. Licensees are selected for focused inspections when data from the NTC and other information indicate that illicit trafficking may be taking place. During FY 2003, there were 14,903 firearms compliance and application inspections conducted.

Explosives Licensing. Similar to the firearms industry, all explosives manufacturers, importers, and dealers must obtain a Federal Explosives License (FEL) from ATF to conduct business, and users of explosives are required to obtain a Fed-

eral permit. The Safe Explosives Act (SEA) expanded the permit requirement to include all persons obtaining explosive materials and added a limited permit category for intrastate purchasers who buy explosives infrequently and do not intend to transport or use the explosives interstate. SEA requires the submission of fingerprints by persons responsible for explosives-related operations and of personal information by these individuals and employees who possess explosives. ATF uses this information to initiate background checks.

Ongoing Explosives Inspections. ATF recognizes the value of averting accidents and keeping explosives from the hands of those who are prohibited from possessing them. ATF enforcement provides a system of industry regulation, emphasizing a proactive approach to potential problems. In the explosives industry, ATF emphasizes the safe and secure storage of explosives and accountability. ATF maintains a regular program of on-site inspections to ensure that explosives are stored in approved facilities that are secure from theft and located at prescribed distances from inhabited buildings, railways, and roads. Immediate action is taken to resolve unsafe storage condi-



ATF inspector performing an inspection at a gun store.

tions. These inspections ensure that the licensees and permittees keep accurate records of the receipt and disposition of explosive materials that are verified through actual inventories of explosives in storage. Unusual discrepancies in records are referred immediately to the appropriate office for further investigation. During FY 2003, inspections resulted in 1,165 explosives industry public safety violations being detected or corrected. ATF conducted a total of 2,721 compliance and 5,162 applications inspections in FY 2003.

National Firearms Act Enforcement

The National Firearms Act (NFA) requires that firearms importers, manufacturers, and dealers register and pay taxes to transfer or make certain weapons. Payment of an annual special occupational tax allows unlimited transfers during the tax year; alternatively, individuals or entities can pay a set amount for each individual transfer. Firearms requiring registration and payment of a transfer or making tax are machineguns, silencers, short-barreled rifles and shotguns, destructive devices, and certain concealable weapons classified as “any other weapons.” ATF processes all applications to manufacture, transfer and register NFA firearms and notices of NFA firearms manufactured or imported. During FY 2003, ATF recorded 264,622 NFA firearms and destructive devices into the registry. The registration information supports the field programs inspecting firearms licensees and conducting criminal investigations. ATF continually provides technical information to the industry and the public concerning compliance with the NFA.

Firearms and Ammunition Importation

ATF regulates the importation of firearms, ammunition, and other defense-related articles through the issuance of import permits. It also maintains close liaison with the Department of State and the U.S. Customs Service to ensure that the permits issued do not conflict with the foreign policy and national security interests of the United States.

Industry Seminars

ATF conducts seminars for firearms and explosive permittees and licensees, providing current information on the laws and regulations pertaining to these commodities. Through these seminars, ATF has fostered partnerships with firearms and explosives industry members to prevent tragedies stemming from the illegal use of firearms and explosives. Seminar attendees include industry officials, licensees, permittees, and State and local law enforcement officials.

Firearms Integration Technology

The Firearms Integration Technology (FIT) system is a multi-year project to combine all of ATF’s firearms IT database systems into three transaction-processing applications. FIT will combine 20 firearms software applications into a set of three integrated transaction-processing applications and one integrated firearms data warehouse for analysis and reporting. This effort will integrate applications from licensing, tracing, enforcement, and analysis. FIT goals are: reducing maintenance and support costs for firearms applications; and providing a web-based tool for interacting with citizens, industry, and law enforcement agencies. This initiative will improve both internal and external customer service. External customers will experience shorter processing times and increased efficiency. Internal customers will be able to use management reports to identify process weaknesses, roadblocks, and resource needs.

G.R.E.A.T. Program

The Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program is a prevention program that seeks to deter students from gang activities and provides them with the necessary life skills to resist violence and gang pressure. The mission of the G.R.E.A.T. Program is to provide classroom instruction for school children and a wide range of community-based activities that result in the necessary life skills, a sense of competency, usefulness, and personal empowerment